



■ *About the Book* ■

This book showcases the wonderland of the 'Fountain of Knowledge' with its numerous natural endowments and serenity as a home to both the Ekitis and non-Ekitis alike and primarily gives an insight to incoming prospective Corps Members deployed to Ekiti State and other states in the federation who haven't yet had the opportunity of partaking in the fully packed N.Y.S.C. Programme especially the once in a lifetime camping experience.

■ *About the Author* ■

Morris Kierama is a graduate of Economics from the Niger Delta University. He hails from Bayelsa State the Niger Delta region of the country. He holds a B.Sc. (Hons) in Economics, 2005). He has four yet to be published books titled, *Separate Destiny*, *Hearthrob*, *Perforated Hearts* and *Devil in the House*. His 'Camp Life', is his first published work. Other than his writing skills, he is also a talented composer and performer.



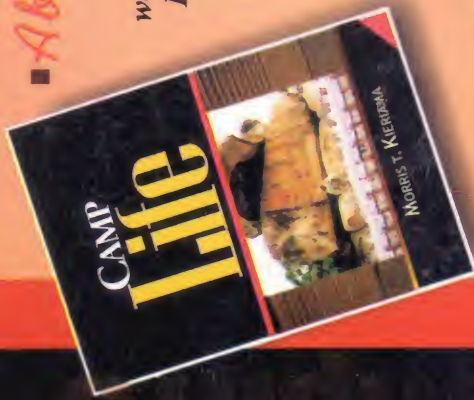
CAMP Life



MORRIS T. KIERAMA



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DEDICATION

DEDICATED SPECIALLY TO MY LATE DAD, MY MUM,
MY SIBLINGS, MY WIFE TO BE AND MY UNBORN
KIDS.

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CHAPTER ONE

I was bothered about the trip to my place of primary assignment. I likened it to evicting oneself from heaven and moving to hell. "How dreadful that would be," I thought. It was dawn, 6.00am precisely that I picked my baggage and started away after bidding my folks goodbye. I could remember my little niece asking me-

"Uncle, when are you coming back?" That question left me indecisive because I had no idea of where I was going to, talkless of when I would return. I told her very soon because I was optimistic I was going to get back. I lifted her little body off the ground to myself and gave her a kiss, told her to behave like Jesus baby as she fondly called herself and I'd told her I'd get her something nice when I returned. I did likewise to my other siblings and then boarded a cab that took me to the park.

As usual, the park was rowdy and crowded - Blaring horns and screeching tyres, 'zoom-zoom' and 'boom' every where; voices of garage boys popularly called 'Agbero' chanting their destinations incessantly rushing to get the luggage of one passenger or another, announcing their route to confuse you if you paid attention.

As I dropped from the cab, a handful of "Agberos" gathered to hustle for my bag.

"Oga.... oga, nah where you dey go? Che nah Lagos? Give me your bag." He dragged it off my hand without waiting for me to affirm his question.

"Oga, no follow am no follow am nah my muto dey for there, che nah Benin, abi nah Delta make we dey go dis side". He pulled my hands.

This was another fellow looking very dark and stout. I was unable to respond to them as I motioned to pay the chauffeur who brought me and struggling to secure my bag with the other hand from the fellow that was dragging it.

"Leave my bag!" I yelled at him. He looked at me and asked me in a low tone this time.

"Nah Lagos Lagos abi? Come, nah only one chance remain".

I did not answer him. I did not believe him also. That's the way they twist you with their pranks. I ignored him and walked into the main garage. As I walked in, more garage tauts harassed me, chanting their destinations.

"Ondo! Bros Ondo, abi nah Akure! Oshogbo, my muto dey there o! Nah you we dey wait for o Oga, ema da won lohun, e ma bo mbi" One Agbero proclaimed.

Where I was going to, had not been mentioned so I ignored and continued with the two heavy bags I carried. One of the Agberos followed me, not wanting to let go.

"Bros, see my bus there, nah only one chance remain! You know where I dey go?" I asked him sternly.

"No be Akure you dey go?" he replied firmly. 'Nah Ekiti 'Ekiti eh----- Ekiti see the bus there --e wo oko mi ni be yen". He spoke Yoruba.

I did not want to go by bus due to the inconvenience and so I did not mind him and I walked to where I could get a wagon. I caught one in sight and walked directly to where the wagon was. The garage taut rained abuses on me and called me names.

"Ewo mugu. Mugu le leyi sha". I went head on and finally, I got to the wagon.

"Ado! Ado!" A man with tribal marks roughly designed on his face came to collect my bags. I recognized him as the man I met the day before, when I came to make enquiries on my journey to Ekiti. But I wasn't certain the place he called was where I was actually going to, so I asked him.

"Ekiti abi?"

"Ekiti ni now- Ado Ekiti na im you dey go abi?" He replied with a question.

I nodded and followed him to the 505 station wagon. On arrival the car seemed empty. It seemed as though I was the first person even at 6.30am, I wondered, so I made enquiries

"Oga, che na only me don come?"

"No.... you no see bag for boot? Five persons don come, make my brother go collect am".

"Five persons already in this car?"

But I could see only one bag tied to the handle of the boot. Did the supposed five passengers come with only one bag? It baffled me but I asked no further questions. I dropped my bags in the boot and waited for the supposed five passengers for thirty minutes or more.

Anyway, the wagon got filled up as four gentlemen and a lady had come by. Three of the men were actually walking together and they'd come earlier than the other gentleman and the only lady. The necessary things were put in place like, the payment of fares, collection of

balances and prayers to God Almighty for journey mercies.

The journey began. As the driver matched on the gas pedal, my heart thumped faster than normal like I was going to lose my life at the place I was heading to. I know it was a feeling of pleasure and fear. I fastened my seat belt to get set for the journey ahead of me. I looked at my wristwatch, it was just some minutes to 9 a.m and so I picked up my cell phone from my waist purse to give my dad who'd been away from home two days back a call, to let him know that my journey had commenced.

It was 3.30pm, about six hours away from the start off time. We'd come a very long way but my destination was not anyway close according to some passengers, I asked inside the second vehicle I took. They'd told me an hour or two was still left, about a hundred and twenty kilometers to be covered. I'd anticipated the total journey to be five hours in all even according to what the chauffeur told me but this was the seventh hour and we were still journeying. I was becoming rather hungry since I'd not taken anything solid except for the Viju milk and pop-corn that kept my grinders busy for the first two hours of the journey.

"Where exactly are you going to?"

The old man by my left asked me inside the 18 seater bus that took off from Akure.

"Sir, I'm going to Ise/Orun Grammar school". I told him.

He looked like one that couldn't speak English when I called his attention but I was perplexed when he replied me in English.

"I don't know where the Grammar school is but I'll tell the driver where you'll drop. Are you a Corper?" He asked.

"Yes Sir", I responded. And, it's my first time. I told him.

"I know", he replied. You'll drop at Ikere junction. When we get there I'll alert the driver for you.

"Thank you Sir. I appreciated. 'Sir', I drew his attention again.

"How long is it from here to Ikere junction". I asked him.

"Some twenty, thirty minutes", he told me.

"That's still a hell of a distance", I thought.

I let the old man alone and rumbled with confusion in my mind wishing we got there as quick as I could blink my eyes. As I sat trying to still the confusion within me, the old man tapped me and told me we were already there and he spoke in Yoruba dialect telling the driver that somebody was to alight.

"Thank you Sir, I told him again and I thanked God I'd arrived my destination, as I thought. I got out of the vehicle, walked towards the boot, carried my bags like would a J.J.C that I truly was. A few steps away from where the bus dropped me to the junction astonished me. A group of Corps members gathered at the junction singing and dancing along side the tune of local drums that were being played, welcoming newly arrived Corps members.

"Welcome Welcome! A male and female Corps member came to pick my bags off me.

"How was your journey? You must be very tired". The female Corper asked me holding my arm while the male Corper sped off with my baggage to a Suzuki bus that looked like a matchbox with its boot opened.

I affirmed her question. She was right. I did not only look tired but was utterly exhausted and famished.

She held my left arm and walked with me towards the bus like she'd been waiting for me.

"Welcome Welcome", the others chorused.

"Where are you coming from?" One of them asked me.

"Abuja!" I told her

"Wow! That's far".

"What school?", another asked me.

"Niger Delta University!" I responded

"Ehn?" The one who had inquired said.

"Niger Delta University", I said again.

"N.D.U. right?" The most plump amongst them all asked me.

"Yeah!" I replied. Quickly, a female Corper brought a bucket and a Lunch box.

"Take these, only N350.00. You'll need them". She told me.

"The bucket alone?" I asked.

"No! The two cost N350.00".

I brought out N500.00 note and handed to her. Another Corps member, a guy came with a brooch, an NYSC brooch valued at N100.00.

"You need this to make you a full Corps member, only hundred naira".

I collected it and paid him. But he insisted he pinned it for me and so he did. I was still bewildered as to the way new Corps members like myself would be so free with an environment they were new to. Perchance, they'd come the day before. This was a Tuesday, the fifth of September 2006, the day of camp resumption. I was not very late as far as I was concerned. These Corps members would probably have come the day before. They were all kitted. My curiosity couldn't be defeated so I asked the female Corps member who'd been holding me.

"Did you come yesterday?"

"Yesterday? Hell no! I've been here since. We're Batch 'A' Corpers, outgoing. Why did you ask?" She grinned.

"It baffled me to see y'all being as free as the birds in a strange land" I told her.

"No! We're outgoing". She said again.

"That's nice" I said.

Suddenly, there was another bus that halted at the junction. Another newly arrived prospective Corps member. "Leave my view, let me see beautiful faces." The very plump Corper said shoving off the male Corper who sold the brooch to me.

"Go and get their things! Help that fine girl".

"You're welcome ... Welcome, where're you coming from? Your school?"

Similar questions they asked me went to the others who were just arriving. We waited for the bus to get filled up. That was the last bus to the orientation camp at Ise/Orun L.G.A

"What's the distance like?"

"Twenty Minutes".

"Only twenty minutes. That's cool!" I said to myself. I felt I had more assurance now than previously.

The shuttle got filled up and we started off.

'WELCOME TO THE N.Y.S.C PERMANENT ORIENTATION CAMP GROUND. ISE, EMURE, ORUN LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA EKITL STATE', was the very first inscription I read on the large moulded block in front of the camp gate.

Alas! I'd arrived. The gate was flung open to allow for the numerous prospective Corps members who were scattered everywhere within the camp. I'd not gone in fully but the crowd I saw astonished me. Students or

prospective corporers better still, from the various four walls of the Nigerian institutions were gathered here. The first thing I could do on entering the gate was to join the long queue where the men in black and black ransacked one's luggage.

"Open your bags before you get to me" One of the policemen said.

"Welcome.... wetin you carry?" Another police asked as he browsed through the bags of one dude in front of me.

"Wetin dey inside here? Condom abi?"

"AhAh.... Officer, I be good boy o". The fat dude lamented with a laugh

"To all of una wey carry condom, happy to disappoint you. No chance for here. All of you go die!" The policeman said.

"Ah Bros! You dey threaten us? Nothing dey happen". The boy replied.

"Hey, you, come this side". Another policeman called one of the girls in my front. She obliged and dragged her bags to him.

"Wetin you pack full dis bag so? You wan come spend the whole year for camp?"

The girl ignored his questions but jeered with exhaustion in her face.

"Hey you!" A voice beckoned to me. It was my turn. I dragged my bags towards the police and left my pail and lunch box behind me.

"If you get any sharp object like knife, heater or iron remove am before you reach me. The police officer said. He wasn't talking to me alone as his voice was loud enough for those on the queue to hear.

I had knife as a cutlery in my bag but no boiling ring and no heater. The policeman unzipped my bag and went on with the check.

'Ah ... Ah!' He seemed surprised.

"Wetin you carry all dis hangers come do? No wardrobe for your information".

I wasn't expecting either, I only just came with some for my own convenience. He went on with the check.

"Your other bag!". He told me. I gave it to him but was surprised he didn't see the knife in the bag he'd just checked. I heard every sharp objects was confiscated for security reasons.

"Where is your I.D.?" He inquired. I brought out my wallet and slipped the I.D. card to him. He examined it and asked.

"You're from Niger Delta University?" He looked at me to get my response, so I nodded my head in affirmation.

"The river school? You're the first I'm seeing here. Welcome, you're good to go". He said and handed me a card with three digits written on it.

I looked at the card, six-one-five was written on it. That means I was the six hundred and fifteenth prospective Corper that had arrived.

"What do I do next?" I asked the policeman.

"Go write your name on that list and proceed to the registration hall. Next!"

He'd barely finished talking to me before he yelled. I complied and carried my bags alongside. As I dragged my bags, some four little 'Full Born Indigenes' (FBI) came to cluster me. I wondered for a very short while before I could understand why they clustered me.

"Brother!" One of them called.

"Make I carry ya bag for you". I agreed and allowed two of them. I know I'd give them a token so I surfed around my wallet and flipped out fifty-naira note for the two indigenes.

The large registration hall was filled to capacity. The number of bag's been much more than the number of persons that crowded the hall. A single individual like me, might have come with two or more bags encroaching any little space that was left in the hall. I looked ahead far into the front of the hall to the staged platform; it was busy with registration officers and prospective corpsers who were undergoing the bureaucracy of tedious registration. I overheard one official calling out the numbers of those to be registered in a range of five. "Two hundred and ten to two hundred and fifteen". "Was that the number they'd reached?" I doubted the fact that I was going to be registered that day. It was already 5pm. Let's see what happens". I mumbled.

"Please keep an eye on my baggage. I'll get back soon", I told a girl who was sitting on her bag in a corner of the hall. She looked at me and nodded.

"Thank you" I said and I absconded. I was going to look for where I could get something to eat and possibly see what the campground was like. I walked out of the registration hall to the other side. The first fascinating thing that caught my attention was a boldly written three letter acronym in red paint - "OBS" in front of the entry of an office in the only storey building that I could see just some steps away from the round about with the statue of a Corper in a half salute. On the field, were some guys and babes dressed in uniform - white T-shirts, white shorts, a pair of white stockings with green design and a pair of white chocks and a black waste purse standing in a file, taking commands from soldiers who stood opposite them.

This group looked like inmates ready to engage in some community development exercise. I walked by the field to the end until I got to the Mammy market. It was a big market with a lot of canopies. I went straight into one of the canopies and ordered for a meal of rice and stew and fried plantain.

"How much is a plate?" I asked the Igbo lady who took my order.

"N100.00". She answered.

It was fair I thought. It wasn't much of a palatable meal but I had no option. I quickly made justice and scurried back to the registration hall to take care of my luggage myself and wait for my turn to be registered.

As I got by, I noticed at the other side was another queue of prospective Corpers with several kinds of forms in their hands, so I went to inquire.

"If you haven't photocopied your call up letter and statement of result, also your I.D. card, you need to be on this queue", were the words of the fella I asked.

"Wow!" I hadn't any of those documents duplicated so I quickly made to get them. The queue was a long one and only one photocopier for all those people standing and squatting under the evening sun. I had neither the patience nor the strength to join the queue so I decided to lobby my way into the front.

"Please, let me join you", I begged.

"I'm sorry you can't. People at the back wouldn't agree. The tall, light skinned fellow told me.

"O.K! Take mine alongside yours and duplicate for me". I pleaded with him.

"You may join the queue, people on the queue are human beings like you". He told me sternly.

I let him alone and went away with my documents. I could duplicate when the line was reduced. But would it ever

reduce? As more people trooped into the orientation camp so would the line increase. I thought.

As I walked back to the registration hall, a voice I couldn't recognize called my name. Who could that be? Who knew me on this camp? If anybody did, it would be Helen, the only student I knew was deployed to Ekiti State during the collection of call-up letters back at school. But it was a male voice that was calling. So I turned quickly to see who it was. I didn't see anybody at my abrupt turn but I roved my eyes to and fro until I caught sight with a hand that was waving at me from the queue. It was Onome, a friend I knew back at school.

"What are you doing here?" I asked in perplexity.

"Man, exactly what you came here for". He was grinning from ear to ear. That was a very good reply to my question. I shook hands with him and gave him a half-hug.

"When did you come?"

"Just some few minutes ago".

"What's your tag number?" I wanted to know if he arrived before or after me.

"6-3-9, what of you?" He asked me after he'd spelt out his number.

"6-1-5!" I gibberished.

"Ehn?" He did not hear me, so I spelt it out to him.

"Six hundred and fifteen".

"Why aren't you on the queue?"

"I went to eat!" I replied.

"Eat? Where?" he was baffled that I'd known the orientation ground so soon.

"The Mammy Market at the back there". I pointed, to show the market was at the direction of my finger.

"Please help me with mine, let me take care of your bag!" He'd come with only one bag and he'd been

dragging it on the queue. He agreed and handed me his bag and I made to keep it where mine were.

I was relieved, shame to that dude that refused to help me with my documents. No sooner than I expected had Onome finished with my documents and had brought it to me. "Thanks man!" I appreciated.

Onome had been a friend of mine back in the days at the University. I'd met him in my first year. He was five feet four inches tall, had a pair of bow legs gracefully endowed by nature, he was fair complexioned, had moustache in the like of a mouse's whiskers and he hailed from Delta state, the Niger Delta region of the country. He was a handsome chap, cool in mind and level headed.

"How did you feel being deployed to this state?" I inquired.

"Not too bad. I wanted to be far away from home and I wanted somewhere I'd never been to. It's ok! And you?"

"Hmmm.... I'd desired three states in the federation initially, Kaduna – Cos' its close to my domain, Calabar – Cos of its evergreen and serene environment and Jos – the coldest and most hilly region in the country. I like cold places you know. For the hills, I don't think I'll be missing the Jos Plateau much. Did you see hills whilst you were coming?"

"Quite a number of them. This region is hilly. They are beautiful."

We continued with our discourse in the full to capacity registration hall until dusk. We'd known it was impossible for us to be registered that day. The registration officers were still combating with the numbers two hundred in various ranges. Suddenly, there was a voice from the megaphone that overshadowed the chaos in the Reg. Hall.

"ATTENTION! ATTENTION!! ATTENTION!!!"

Before we knew it, the hall went into dead silence as everyone was keen to grasp the piece of information

"Listen up!" The official said. "if your number falls between 460 to the last. We're expecting one thousand seven hundred Corps members. If your number fell within this range, you may leave the hall now. We'd continue with you tomorrow".

Hardly had the officer finished talking when voices rose up in the hall.

"Where do we go to?" There was murmuring.

"Proceed to the camp store for collection of mattresses you'd use tonight. But this cannot be done without the presentation of your institution I.D. card. These mattresses are to be returned the next morning and do not forget to collect your I.D. cards, without which you cannot register. Have I made myself clear?"

"Yes Sir!" was chorused.

Within the twinkle of an eye, the camp store was crowded as those who heard the announcement from outside had sped off to queue in front of the store.

Those who got mattresses earlier had gone to secure bed spaces in the dormitory. It was my turn so I presented my Economics department I.D card to receive my mattress. Unfortunately, I was given a mattress that was as flat as the width of two blankets folded together. It implied that several corps members had slept on that piece several times until it had begun to plead to be discarded.

I ran away with it to secure a space for myself also. The space I got was the top of a double decker very close to one of the netted windows with louvre glasses. Several dudes trooped into the room to secure bed spaces. There was this fellow that came in. He was overweight and huge. He was dark skinned and had a head that looked like the

turtle ninja. He was full of humour as he'd carried every guy in a rave including me. I admired his sense of humour and the way he exuberated as he talked. He was talking about his encounter with the "Men in black and black" at the gate as he trooped in but in a rather funny way. Every Tom, Dick and Harry bursted into laughter. I laughed as well and as I finished laughing, I looked at him keenly. I recognized he was the fellow in front of me on the queue that was harassed by the policemen for bringing a 'French letter'.

"I like this dude". I thought to myself and concentrated in packing my luggage on my bunk. He'd just finished talking and the rave had come down a bit as everyone wondered what a joker he was.

Suddenly, it was time for familiarization. Everyone was getting acquainted. The fat dude had come to inquire of my name and where I came from.

"Morris, Niger Delta University in Bayelsa State. I'm from Brass in Bayelsa State and based in the Federal Capital territory". I told him accordingly as his questions came.

"You?" I asked him.

"Call me Emeks but my name is Emeka-a.k.a Jingle Bell" I smiled with a half grin as I listened to him. This guy must be a clown. I had considered him a pure Easterner with his name but his accent was much more a southerner.

"I am a half cast," he said 'Delta-Igbo. I graduated from UNILAG, studied Micro Biology and I stay at Sapele in Delta State. No, mostly in Sapele. I cruise around Lagos a lot. My elder brother is there so I shuttle between Lagos and Delta. Nice to meet you". He said to me and he shook my hand.

"Nice to meet you too man" I replied. He was directly opposite me but a bunk below Harry, a guy from my institution. It was talk here and there alongside acquaintances until twilight.

CHAPTER TWO

The first night in a strange land was sort of horrible. I was not used to several things like being in a crowded room, sleeping with two bright fluorescent bulbs in between noises like snores, grunts, coos and chirps. Bleats and neighs seemed to be part of the onomatopoeic sounds in the room that night. Several fart emissions diffused through the room from mannerless folk; got me really infuriated. Prior to my being taken into oblivion that night, Emeks had cautioned the fellas that were close to him.

"Can y'all deal with snores?"

"Why not!" I thought. I'd contended with my cousin's snoring. It was despicable though but hey, I could handle it.

"Please, you guys should forgive me especially my bunk mate. I've been trying to curb it but May be I'm cursed". He'd barely finished and the dudes had gone into rave. What he meant I did not get until he took to sleep. He'd slept before me, so I had the experience of what he said. He needed pardon sincerely especially from his bunk

mate. He was a terrible snorer. His was more than snore. Call it grunt – he grunted the whole night. Snoring is a reflex action that is caused by a soft vibration in the palate. Since its reflex, we forgave him and tutored him on how he could sleep to curb it.

The night was very short. The soldiers and the Man 'O' War had made it very short for us that liked sleeping until it was dawn. It was only 4.30am. The cries from the military men were frightening. "Fall in! Fall in..." They had gone round to bang the doors of every hostel. What that meant, a lot of us did not understand. I was not totally stale because I'd had some paramilitary trainings before.

"Out!" The soldier that came to my hostel had yelled on the top of his voice. "Every body, to the parade ground. I register or 'I no register, out now!" He commanded. He had a baton in his hand. Was he going to hit any obdurate fellow? Certainly not me. I jumped out of the top bunk, sluggishly though. "Was this what I'm going to face for the next twenty one days?" We struggled out of the doorway to the parade ground. It was still very dark and extremely cold. I looked around, several of us had trooped out of the hostels. To the far right, were the girls strolling sluggishly with their hands folded across their breast. To my left, were the already registered one's kitted in their white upon white, jumping, stretching or rubbing their palms against each other to beat the cold. The number of those in white upon white was nothing compared to the unregistered one's in mufti. We shrubbed the whole place like grasses.

As I looked at those in white upon white, there were guys and there were girls exuberating in the early morning cold. I was astonished because I'd known girls to give in to cold very easily either fallen under the scourge

of pneumonia or fever. I was in a jazzy long sleeve shirt and a dirty blue denim trousers and I was feeling really cold. I compared myself to those kitted one's in an ordinary T-shirt, knickers, a pair of stockings and chocks. So I gathered momentum to show I could withstand the cold.

"Double up!" was a voice beckoning to those that were still lazing there way to the parade ground.

"Hey... Attention!" Was another voice that blared off the speakers of the public address system. It was still dark and so the officials in the middle of the parade ground could barely be seen. We only listened to the voice from the P.A. system.

"A-T-T-E-N-T-I-O-N!" was yet another fierce voice by the same person. In response to the voice was thunderous bangs of feet.

"All of you over there are bloody civilians. Listen to my last command. You register, you no register". There were murmurings hither and thither. It was us in mufti he'd referred to as 'Bloody Civilians'.

"A-T-T-E-N-T-I-O-N!" He yelled again. I know he was drawing the attention of everybody so I kept my mouth shut. The bangs from the various feet was even more thunderous than it was the first time.

"Good morning Gentlemen, Corps members" It was a female official that was talking through the P.A. system.

"Good morning ma". We responded in unison.

"It is not good morning Ma, it is good morning Sir. This is a military Camp, everybody in the military is regarded as a Sir irrespective of his gender. So, if I greet you again you respond accordingly! Is that clear?"

"Yes Ma!" some answered "Yes Sir," the quick to grasp ones answered.

"Good Morning Gentlemen, Corps members!"

"Good Morning Sir!" We all answered unanimously.

"How was your night?"

"It was too short, it was cold, it was fine", came the different responses.

"Well.... you are welcome to NYSC Ise/Orun permanent orientation camp here in Ise/Orun/Emure local Govt. area in Ekiti State".

"Thank you Sir...!"

"Before we start properly with the order of the day, let's commit the day into the hands of the Almighty God. And to do this, would be representatives from amongst you, a Christian and a Muslim. Run to the centre here and collect the microphone". One kitted Corps member ran to get hold of the mic whilst another in mufti followed. The prayers were rendered both in the Christian and Islamic ways.

"Thank you, you may go back. Once again you are welcome to this orientation camp. This camp will last for only twenty one days including yesterday. Therefore, you are expected to adhere strictly to the rules and regulations that would be given to you any moment from now and you are expected to partake in all activity the camp has to offer.

Meanwhile, this is an assembly of graduates from all over the federation and as such, you are to behave like graduates that have gone through the four walls of the University System. Before the introduction of the officials you see here, I'll like us to learn the Youth Service Anthem that we would be reciting everyday alongside the National Anthem and Pledge. I'll read it out and you'll repeat after me.

*Youths Obey the clarion call
Let us lift our Nation high
Under the sun and in the Rain
With dedication and selflessness
Nigeria.. 's ours Nigeria we serve.*

There were murmurings when the third line was recited which reads, "Under the sun and in the rain". "Does it mean we'd be out here when there's rain?" This question was asked.

"Not only you, the officials themselves would be out under scorching sun and under heavy down pours. We are here to instill discipline amongst us. Anyone found inside the hostel when he/she is supposed to be out would be dealt with. Do not fall prey in the hands of these hungry battalions. Now, we're going to recite this anthem after which we'll take the National Anthem and Pledge. After the count of two - Youth Service Anthem One-Two go! So many voices took the recitation as much as they knew how to.

"That's not good enough. The lady on the microphone said.

"Next time we'd do it better. Is that O.K?"

"Yes!"

"The people you see here are officers responsible for the administration of this orientation camp. I'm going to introduce them according to the various strata. The very first person who is unavoidably absent in our midst is the state Coordinator of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) who is responsible for the overall arrangement and organization of the orientation course of the National Youth Service Corps in this state. She is a woman of substance. She is none other than Mrs. O.A. Erokwu. Better introductions would be made on Friday when you'll finally get to meet her. The next person to the state

coordinator is the Camp Director in charge of the general well-being of Corps members and oversees the provision of changing facilities. He is Mr. C.A. Ojo. He is here with us. His office is the one next to the 'OBS'. You can applaud him. Next, is the Camp commandant who's responsible for the para-military aspect of the orientation course, he ensures that discipline is maintained on camp and assists the camp Director in the routine of Camp administration. He is no other than Major M.T. Usman. He'd have a word or two for you on the rules and regulations of this orientation camp. He's ably assisted by the R.S.M.. They'll both talk to you later.

Quickly, we have the head of Man 'O' War who is responsible for the leadership and citizenship training activities and ensures adequate safety of the Man 'O' War gadgets. We also have the head of Red Cross – responsible for the provision of First Aid to Corps members on Camp. The Head of Police also is here and he's responsible for handling security matters and maintenance of law and order on camp. All these heads will introduce themselves better to you in the course of this orientation camp and I am the protocol officer – Mrs. Olusoji Olanike. My office is at the 'OBS'. Wonder what that is? It is the Orientation Broadcasting Service. You can come there with your complaints any time of the day. If you don't meet me, my assistant, Mr. Toyin will be there to attend to you. I'll hand the microphone to the Camp Commandant who'd continue with you but before then, you're welcome once again to the NYSC permanent Orientation Camp here in Ise/Orun/Emure local government area of Ekiti State". She handed the microphone to the uniformed man and we applauded her.

"Thank you Sir – we love you", voices from the crowd echoed.

There were several voices murmuring, stuttering, gibberishing and blabbing words until the P.A. system hooted.

"Wee..." That was the voice of the camp commandant. We could see the officials better now. The dark morning was giving way to brightness.

"Wee...OO!" The commandant said again. There were no response as we were dumbfounded.

"When I say Wee. You say Wa! Is that clear?"

"Yes Sir!"

"OK" Wee! "Wa! We responded. "Wee.... Oo! "Wa ... oo!" we replied again.

"Wee Wee! The major said again "Wa... Wa! We'd gotten used to it. "Wee...oo.... He said again.

"Nah wa ...ooo!" Some of us replied.

"You have just listened to the P.R.O. you must abide by the rules and regulations of this camp. Any one of you that falls prey, we will devour. My boys are here to discipline you. Those of you in mufti are not our business for now. When you're registered then, we have the mandate to discipline you to our taste". There was shouting amongst the unregistered crowd.

"Quiet" the major, commanded.

"All of you would assemble here every morning by 4.30am. You register, you no register. You're kitted, you're not kitted. At the sound of the beagle, you're expected to run-up here for the day's announcement and your morning P.T. by 10am. Those of you that are already kitted are to come out here for another round of drills. And by 4.00pm in the evenings, you kitted one's are to be out here again for evening drills. This will continue everyday except on Sundays and days that have been marked out for special programs. Now, the rules and regulations will be given to you after which the Beagler here would blow his

beagle to acquaint you with the different sounds for various events that would take place here on camp.

Now, the don'ts of this Orientation camp are as follows:

- ❖ Cultism is a taboo on NYSC camp. None of you for any reason should be found around the bushes. If you are caught you'll be assumed to be a cultist and punishment would be meted on you.
- ❖ Drug Addiction is prohibited on Camp.
- ❖ Stealing in camp is a criminal offence. If you are found wanting you'd be treated like a common criminal.
- ❖ Avoid rumour mongering; always seek information from the right quarters. The 'OBS' would give you most of the information you need.
- ❖ Group meetings are not allowed on camp.
- ❖ Lights out is by 10.00pm everyday. You're expected to be in your beds when it's lights out. Any corps member found wanting would be manhandled.
- ❖ Smoking/chewing of gum on the parade ground is prohibited.
- ❖ Rape is a very serious crime here on camp and against humanity. This is a special warning to the male corps members.
- ❖ Fighting is a crime.
- ❖ Flippancy attracts severe punishment.
- ❖ Fake corps members are endangering their lives. If you were not originally deployed to this camp and you're here, you have a grace of now till 2.00pm to abscond this environment.
- ❖ Nursing Mothers and Pregnant women amongst us will not be registered. This is for the ladies.

❖ Lastly, all programs, activities are designed for your own good. You must participate in them.

A word is enough for the wise. The Major had just finished talking. The R.S.M. will continue from here". He said before finally handing over the microphone.

The R.S.M. is a very dark and fierce looking man with tribal marks on both cheeks like one he'd gotten whilst engaging in a baut with a wild cat. He looked more advance and aggressive than the major in the Khaki camouflage, slightly pot bellied. He'd ordered the beagler to alert us on the various alert tones.

"Listen attentively". He told us.

"If you are kwot doing the wrong thing at a particular alert tone, you will be dealt with. The Hausa intonation, heavy on his spoken English. He's no doubt a Northerner.

As we payed attention, several sounds emitted from the beagle.

"The sound you just heard means that, you're to fall in here to the parade ground. At anytime of the day you hear this sound, every one of you must double-up to the parade ground either for announcement or for physical training. The next sound is for you to stand still wherever you are and whatever you were doing at the time the beagler blows this sound, you're to desert, and keep still. This sound comes up only at 6.00am in the mornings when our country flag is risen implying the awakening of our great country Nigeria and 6.00pm in the evenings when the flag is dropped – meaning the country goes to sleep. Anybody caught rigmarolling at the time the beagle sounds, would face the music. It is a simple thing. Your being still is not up to a minute. Don't fall prey!"

Several sounds emitted from the beagle as the beagler blew, carrying along their various messages, like

the sound for Emergency. But the most appealing was the one for food. As the beagler blew and announced that that was for food, the Corps members shouted in excitement and quickly composed lines for the tune.

"Hungry Corpor... food is ready. Food is ready. Hungry Corpor.. Food is ready. Food is ready"

The morning had finally registered itself to the fullest. Announcements seemed to have come to an end. What next? Morning drills were to commence. The unregistered prospective Corpors had been distinguished already. Some soldiers and Man'O'War had come to split us into segments acting on command. I'd fallen into the group of a soldier that seemed to be the youngest looking at his size. He is not bigger than I was, not even as tall as I was. He commanded us to do everything he did and respond accordingly to his tunes. We obliged and participated, as we were ready to burn off the cold in our systems.

The morning drills lasted for only twenty to twenty five minutes for us the unregistered members while the kitted one's carried on.

We were told to go for our registration, which was to commence, by 8.00am that morning. "Fall out!"

We scurried back into our temporary dwellings. The next very important thing was to return our mattresses for the collection of our ID cards or else, registration impossibility.

I got by my hostel, dragged down my very slim mattress and followed those who'd already sped off with theirs. We dumped the mattresses in front of the store and waited for our names to be called from our identity cards. It took some quality minutes before mine was handed to me.

As I got mine, I ran to the registration hall to see if the process had commenced. Even though the exercise had commenced, I still had a lot of time to while away before it would get to my turn. I was a loner, doing things all by myself and going places within the camp by myself. I'd lost contact with Onome and Harry though we slept in the same room; I'd not seen them during the morning's Clarion call. As I got by the doorway, a girl I knew back at school was approaching me from the opposite direction. Her name was Jennifer.

"You're here too," She said.

"I thought we were just two of us, Helen and I. Now, we are five". I told her.

"We're up to twelve. Big boy, Jeremiah Jerryson, Innocent, Onome, Franka.." She was calling names.

"Which Franka? I asked her.

"Your friend", She told me.

"My Franka you mean!" I was overjoyed. "Where's she?"

"She's gone back to P.H. she forgot her Statement of Result and she went to get it".

"Oops! When did she leave?"

"Yesterday morning. She came in on Monday just like I did".

"What was she thinking? Going back to P.H. is a hell of a distance. Anyway I'll call her."

"I've got to get my duplicated document from the hostel. It's about my turn". She told me and whooshed out the door.

"Nice to meet you girl". She barely heard that as she was already on her way as I spoke.

The registration officers had all been seated. All documents, tables and chairs, screening bulbs, files and folders had all been put in place. The numbers in various

ranges had been announced. This time, from 301-315. It seemed Jennifer fell within this range. She was a short well-endowed, dark-skinned girl. A graduate of Business Administration. She was a fine girl who was very much poised and daring. I rummaged a while in the Reg. Hall hoping to recognize one face or another. There were several faces but none that I knew even from Adam or at the camp there and so I went back to my empty bunk where my bags laid in wait for me so I could get ready for the day.

As I got back to the dormitory, there was laughter in the air in between noises. My bunkies had started in their usual joking manner. As far as I was concerned, that was probably going to be the order of the day. We had no business other than registration that kept us in wait to make us para-military otherwise we were bloody civilians as the R.S.M called us.

Even if we succeed with registration that day, it would be in the evening. That meant we had the morning and noon to laugh away our ribs, until they cracked. The trainings on the field were still going on. The white upon white was glittering snowy in the early morning sun. The different groups and the different physical exercises made the sight interesting and beautiful. Those of us, who couldn't waste a way in the hysteria in the room, glued our eyes on the physical trainings on the parade ground and tongue lashing when necessary and even when unnecessary. I was one of those who watched the P.T. It pays to be counted amongst the first in anything. Less stress, especially in situations like this. The crowd to be registered that was ahead of me got me sick to think about.

I decided to climb up the staircase of the storey building where I'd noticed Preye, a bunkie that was abreast me in the room. He was a skinny dude about, my height who

claimed to be an activist at the Lagos State University, I acquainted myself with him the night before when we got into the dormitory. More acquaintance I thought. He was leaning on the balcony amongst other fellas watching the P.T. exercises on the parade ground. "You seem to be catching fun here", I told him, tapping him on his left shoulder.

"Morris, right?" He asked me.

"Yeah". I replied.

"The exercises are eye catching wished I came earlier to be part of it. It was the stupid bank I was to get money from that delayed me. If not, would have been here on Monday. Now, I may probably be the last batch to be registered". He complained.

"How?" I inquired.

"Look at my tag". He brought it out from his waist purse and showed it to me. 'I'm, one thousand, twenty eight". He didn't seem to like it and he put it back. "I hope to be registered before the swearing in ceremony on Friday".

"Today's Wednesday. They might get to you before the day ends tomorrow. They seem to be faster. The range is fifteen people unlike five of the day before and the start time is early enough. As for me, I hope to be registered before 4.00pm".

"That's fair enough. Some hours from now".

We talked about different things until I was beginning to feel hungry.

The time had walked away. The morning hours were far gone. It was the early evening. I had always been putting my ears to the ground to know the numbers the registration officers called so I'm not taken aback. Any moment from then would be my turn so I hung around in the very stuffy Reg. Hall until my range was called. After

several screening on the various Reg. Tables and the sight of some very stern looking officials. I got registered.

"Move to the Camp store to collect your Kits". I was told

"Thank God! Alas, I'd made it. I was no longer a prospective Corper nor a bloody civilian but a recognized and bonafide corps member and a para-military and what the populace calls 'Government pikin'.

CHAPTER THREE

The evening of that same day was very free for me. I had nothing to worry about. Not even registrations. I'd been registered. Let those who were still bloody civilians or prospective Corpers worry about that. My only worry was how to join those who'd been having physical trainings and parade all along.

I decided to have solace at the round about very close to the 'OBS' amongst other Corpers and prospective Corpers. The megaphone emitted deafening sounds that could keep even a sleeping giant awake. It was some piece of announcement.

"Attention please! some yet to be collected identity cards belonging to the following persons – Haruna Bada, from the Federal Polytechnic Bida; Adekunle Adebayo, University of Jos; Julius Jude; Federal University of Technology Owerri; Grace Ogbagbe, Ambrose Ali University Ekpoma and Okoi O. Okoi, Rivers State University of Technology – RSUT. If you heard your name, you are hereby advised to come for the collection of your Identity Card at the 'OBS' in order to effect your registration process. Thank you!".

The announcer stopped announcing and the megaphone muted. "Why would some people be very lackadaisical to important affairs?" I thought, I didn't know any of the names mentioned so I was unperturbed. I'd booked the remaining part of the evening with my bosom friend who'd arrived earlier in the day to meet up with the registration but was unable to. That was the reason I was at the round about.

I wanted to while away the night until it was lights out. As I sat there toying with my fingers and with my right limb across my left, thoughts of my first parade in the white upon white compound wear enclouded my mind. I was then going to be under the noses of the military men and the Man 'O' War. I was always going to be seen in my compound wear under extreme cold weathers and even under scorching sun unless for exceptional occasions. That was part of the rules of the camp. Being in Mufti was a prohibition. Sundays was the only day of grace. I was not very good at rules especially when the rules were stern. That has always been the problem with man. They make rules they cannot keep. Even the rules or the commandments given to Moses by God were always flouted. I was still reminiscing when the beautiful one I was waiting for became visible. She approached me with a particular slow stiff gait.

"How was your day?" She asked me with a scintillating grin.

"Pretty-fine! Like you." I said. I was poised and intrepid. I meant what I said. She was a very pretty damsel, one that even an eunuch would wish to have at his disposal.

"Come sit here!" I told her, tapping on the moulded block where I was sitting. She complied and sat by me, putting her left hand across my shoulder.

We were not the only people there. There were several other corps members and prospective Corpers amidst us. Most of them were coupled, just like Franka and I. Franka and I have been friends for God knows when. We first met at the Glory land Campus and have been friends until we were finally deployed to Ekiti State. My knowledge about her being there at the camp filled me with great enthusiasm.

We talked a lot that night. So much scores to settle that were at stake. The next day was going to be the day I would be a partaker of the para-military trainings. Many of us had been enrolled into the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC).

The day I'd been waiting for finally came. It was another cold morning as usual. The beagle had been blown. I'd heard it in my sleep like an alert tone. Like it was a pin that pierced my nude body keeping my sensory neurons responding to the stimulus. I jumped out of bed but was still sitting down so as to reassure myself that I was off Utopia and then in the real world. I looked around the room, there were still a few sleepers on the various bunks. Almost a many were awake rummaging the large room containing about fifty six male Corpers.

It was 4.15am. The morning was really chilly. Waking up at a time like that was a great turn off for me but what would a helpless fellow like me do in an environment like that with military men and the police, including the Man 'O' War? The environment was a stern one. We were like inmates that had been convicted for serious criminal offences.

The exuberance of my first parade made me jump down from my bunk. I had filled my pail with water the evening before in other not to queue at the break of dawn. The dormitory had become so busy. Every male Corper

had jumped down from their bunks except for the lazybones and the one's that were still in prospect. I had dragged my bucket of water from underneath my bunkies bath. I hurried up to the bathroom to have a clean fresh bath. The cold I felt in the room was nothing compared to what I felt when I stepped outside. I'd began to shiver even before I got into the bathroom. I had only but fifteen minutes left to be on the parade ground else I'd be facing the wrath of the military men if caught.

"Fall in! Fall in! Fall in!" Voices of soldier men filled the air. The doors of hostels squeaked as they banged. I was still in the bathroom when I heard the voices and footsteps of Corpers scurrying out of the dormitory.

"I give you five minutes to be on the parade ground". The voices were loud and clear for me to hear even as the water splashed on the floor. I was not the only one in the bathroom at that time. We were eight or ten guys bathing at the same time. Even some more were waiting to take their turn.



First parade

I hurried back to the hostel. The room was almost without a Corps member as many had worn their compound wears and headed for the parade ground even without bathing. The morning was too cold for one to have a cold bath. It was only the daring one's like me that had our bath before going for the morning P.T.

I quickly put on my compound wear and whooshed away to join my counterparts. I hadn't time to admire myself in my new outfit. Although my T-Shirt, stockings and Jungle boots were okay but my pair of knickers were above the knees and short like a boxer panties and the NYSC face cap was like a beggars plate, I wore them anyways.

The normal routines on the parade ground were started. The soldiers had called us to attention and given us strict warnings on the time we were to leave our hostels and when to be on the parade ground. It was the voice of the R.S.M. The morning was still dark and so we could barely see the officials but we could discern their voices as we'd known who each one was.

"The next time my boys would have to chase you out from your room, you are finished. If I catch any of you, 'Ya pada' will not recognize you when you leave this camp". He'd warned us, as he thought. There were a lot of gibberishing amongst the Corpers.

"We're not kids o ...". I overheard a voice in the crowd. The soldiers and Man 'O' War paraded us around with sticks and batons in their hands.

"Shut up! Shut up! They yelled at the Corpers. We kept mute and in no time the P.A. system voiced out. It was the voice of the P.R.O. She greeted us as usual, called for the morning prayers. Since Jesus started with prayers, all assembly of Corps members must begin with prayers

from the two major religions – Islamic and Christianity. It was the normal routine.

"You're welcome to this morning P.T. Today is the most important day of your camping experience. Today shall be the official swearing in ceremony. His Excellency, the Governor of the state; the Deputy Governor; the Chief Judge of the state, the NYSC state co-ordinator and other dignitaries shall be present here on camp. This ceremony shall be commencing by 11.00am this morning. All registered Corps members are expected to be dressed in the NYSC ceremonial outfit. That is, the NYSC face cap, the crested NYSC vest, the Khaki trousers and belt and the jungle boots. The unregistered Corps members that would not be able to meet up with registration before this ceremony, should come out in their muftis and must be behind the registered one's at the time of the ceremony. Any act, I mean good act that is displayed by your counterparts must be applauded and cheered. Those of you that were chosen for one special event or another would wait behind after this morning P.T. This information is for those who studied Mass Communication and English. If you are confident and you have a good command of the English Language, I'd need you to meet me at the 'OBS' immediately after this exercise".

The announcement of the P.R.O. was very brief and down to brass tracks. She handed the P.A. system to the Camp commandant who gave us the other necessary information on what was obtainable at the ceremony. I was new to the parade and some of the terminologies. They'd already had selections from the earlier registered members. There were selections for the Corpers Band, representatives for the six geo-political zones in the country, selection for quarter guard, flag bearers, parade commander and so forth.

How the selection was made, I did not know since I'd not had the opportunity to be part of those that had been registered early enough. Rehearsals on the various activities had been on since the days before. I had only watched from a distance.

"Those of you that do not have any special function for today's ceremony would be allowed to leave and return at the sound of the beagle by 10.00am. And those of you that are yet to be registered, immediately after this announcement, proceed to the registration hall. But if at the sound of the beagle by 10.00am, you are still unregistered, join your counterparts on the parade ground with your muftis. Do I make myself clear? And then the others in neither of the two categories should wait behind". He handed the microphone to the R.S.M. We saw him whisper words into the ear of the R.S.M and he walked away.

I presumed the day to be a very busy one as the officials did every thing in brief. The whispered words if I could guess correctly were that the P.T. should commence but not more than 10-15 minutes at most. Physical trainings usually lasted thirty to one hour or even more.

In less than twenty minutes, we'd heard the soldiers' shout, fall out! We'd been dismissed. My guess was correct. We returned to our dormitories in our large numbers leaving only the selected few to carry on their functions with the battalion and the Man 'O' War.

The hour had come by. The hands of the clock must have ran instead of ticking. The beagler had sounded his beagle sending all and sundry out under the scorching sun. We filed like soldier ants around the field glowing in our NYSC kits. My girlfriend, Franka had been lucky to be registered prior to the ceremony. She'd complained of being ignorant of the rules and technique of the parade.

"Stay behind me and watch my every move". I told her as though I knew any better. After all there were not so much activities except that we listen to the last commands as we've always been told.

The day was very bright and fair. The sun had been positioned thousands of miles away from planet earth but spat venomous heat that made it look like it was only a mile away. We'd been unfortunate not to listen to the network news the day before in order to hear the meteorologist announce it would be a sunny day. We had no option but to stand underneath the scorching sun. We weren't dignitaries after all, that had canopies roofed above their heads and plastics chairs and sofas for comfort.

"Fall in threes!" The military men in their ceremonial outfit yelled at us. There was a particular soldier that nicknamed himself 'Guerilla'. He'd become so famous and earned himself so much popularity as every Corps member hailed him as he passed by. He was jovial and had a sense of humour, no doubt, but I'd not liked him as others had claimed he was the best amongst the soldiers. I hated his unseriousness other than that; I'd no grudge for him. He paraded himself with his camouflage coloured backpack with a stick. He looked like one that has just fought and worn the guerilla wars and was returning with victory. He chanted one of the usual parade choruses in a bid to hypen us as he rummaged about us.

"Moral! Morals!! Morals!!!

We were waiting for the dignitaries and their emissaries to surface. Every thing had been put in place, the canopies and sitting arrangements, the sound systems, the red carpet for His Excellency, the podium, the quarter guards had already been positioned and we, the Corps member of which the day was declared.

"Any moment from now, His Excellency would arrive. Stand at Attention!" We were told.

The corps members and the police band had taken position getting ready to play their instrument at the slightest signal. All invited guest were seated underneath those well-decorated canopies, waiting. First it was the arrival of the state coordinator – Mrs. O.A. Erokwu. All invited guests were obliged with a standing ovation to honour the arrival of the State Coordinator.

We were already standing and standing we'd remain until the end of the ceremony. The State Coordinator was surfacing for the first time on camp. And that meant, we were seeing her for the first time. She'd been ushered in by the P.R.O. and two female Corper volunteers.

The next arriving guests were the Royal fathers of the Day, the Chairman and Members of the NYSC State Governing Board, the Chief Judge of the State and Commissioner of Police. We stood still under the sun that smiled angrily at us pouring down its heat without mercy watching the dignitaries troop into the premises with their fleet.

In no time, there was the blast of the sirens of pilot 1 convoy trooping into the campground. The man of the moment without which the ceremony would be flawless was arriving. All invited guests and dignitaries alike stood on their feet to welcome him. It was the Governor of the State. The P.R.O. had announced.

"May we do well to welcome the Governor of Ekiti State – Dr. Peter Ayodele Fayose, as we arise".

I tilted my head leftward to notice the band Conductor getting ready to issue commands. He finally did and the Police Band began to play. We recited the

National Anthem and Pledge and the NYSC Anthem before the dignitaries sat down.

The ceremony had started. It was the introduction of the guests of honour. The P.R.O. still had the microphone.

"May I be honoured to call to the podium the woman of the day, a woman of virtue and substance. A woman that speaks and even the men tremble. She's none other than the State Coordinator, the mother of the NYSC body in Ekiti State in the person of Mrs. O.A. Erokwu. Let me debase so she abases to introduce our Guests of honour. Ma, you are welcome". They gave themselves a half hug as we applauded. She cleared her throat before speaking into the microphone.

"Her Excellency". We heard her say. To our utmost dismay, his Deputy and some emissaries represented the State Governor.

"...the State Governor of the State, Dr. Peter Ayodele Fayose ably represented by His Deputy, Chief Mrs. Abiodun Olujimi, the Chief Judge of the State. The Chairman, NYSC Ekiti State Governing Board - Mr. Oluwole Ariyo and other members of the high table, all protocols duly observed. After the brief introduction, she gave her speech.

"My dear Corps members, it gives me the greatest pleasure to welcome you all very warmly to the Ekiti State Camp for the 2006 BATCH B Orientation Course and to extend to you, the greetings of the management and staff of the NYSC at the National Directorate Headquarters and the Ekiti State Secretariat. I wish to use this medium to congratulate you on the successful completion of your service at your various institutions. The Orientation Course Programme is the most potent means of introducing Corps participants to the* aims and objectives

of the National Youths Service Corps Scheme, with a view to preparing them for the task ahead. It is the foundation on which each service year is built. This being the case, our watch-word throughout the period of this orientation course and indeed the service year shall be "*Discipline and Patriotic service to our fatherland*". Gentlemen Corps Members, as you will be referred to henceforth, I wish to solicit your cooperation in order to make the running of the camp easy and smooth for the camp officials. I have no doubt on my mind that you have come with great enthusiasm and dedication to serve this great nation selflessly and loyally for one year.

The Orientation Camp is one big family, I therefore urge you to interact freely and consult with other corps members at the platoon level and as members of committees that will be put in place to facilitate the smooth running of the Orientation programme. The NYSC scheme has absolute confidence in the ability, integrity and capability of Corps participants. I therefore hope that you will justify this confidence.

Apart from introducing you to the service year, the orientation course is also designed to instill in you the attributes of dedication and altruism for you to become the masters of yourselves so that you can better appreciate the fastening problems of this country and be able to render purposeful services to our fatherland. To achieve this objective therefore, the orientation course programme has been packaged to include Para-military drills, Man 'O' War activities, lectures, discussion session, socio-cultural and sporting activities. Of major significance and importance is the Entrepreneurship Development Programme (EDP), which had been packaged to elicit your interest in job creation and self-employment. This is to

ensure that at the end of the service year, you will not find yourselves among the army of the unemployed.

To achieve this task, discipline is of necessity. It is the bedrock on which orderliness, progress of an individual, community or a nation can be assured. Any act of indiscipline during the orientation course period and indeed throughout the Service Year shall be visited with appropriate immediate punishment. You are therefore advised to participate actively and seriously in all camp activities and service year programmes. Significant contributions shall be acknowledged and rewarded accordingly. We in Ekiti State cherish excellence and we propel you to achieve this during the service year".

It was a long but fully-packed speech. I did not know that after the tedious academics of the four year of my schooling period, I was going to be compelled to attend further lectures. When it would start, I didn't or better still, we didn't know. May be a few knew. She stepped down from the podium and handed back the microphone to the P.R.O.

Afterwards, there were several activities that followed suit. Like representative of the various thirty six states of the country, salutation of the guests of Honour by the Corps members represented by the Parade Commander, lifting of the country's flag, cultural displays, speeches from the Deputy Governor, as well as the Chairman of the NYSC governing body and others. The most important was the oath of allegiance that was anchored by the Chief Judge of the state. We were to put our right hand up while the left was placed on our chest as we echoed.

"In pursuance of our aspiration to build a united peaceful prosperous hitch free egalitarian society and a

great nation and our motto-Service and Humility'. Now repeat after me.

"I We were to put our names in the blank space as we were taking the oath of allegiance. "Member of the National Youth Service Corps 2006 hereby pledge to follow at all times the leadership of those in authority irrespective of their social and educational background and in particular, *I shall:*

- At all times and in all places, think, act, regard myself and speak first as a Nigerian before anything else.
- Be proud of my fatherland, appreciate and cherish the culture, traditions, arts, and languages of the nation.
- Be prepared to serve honestly, faithfully and if need be, pay the supreme sacrifice for my fatherland.
- Be well informed about the history, geography, economy and the resources of Nigeria.
- Regard fellow Nigerians as my brothers and sisters and myself as my 'Brother's Keeper'.
- Have a healthy attitude to work and play, I shall not only be deployed, but also genuinely identify myself with the problems and aspiration of the people of the areas in which I work.
- Tackle difficulties and challenges in a disciplined and self-reliant manner, constitutionally pursuing, grievances and properly channeling such for redress.
- See myself always as a leader who must give effective leadership by my transparent honesty and selfless service.
- Detest and shun bribery and all forms of corruption and nepotism. Be courteous and polite to all and sundry.

Be obedient without being slavish and always remember the motto and strive continuously to live up to the ideals of the National Youth Service Corps, during and after my Service Year. So help me God."

Now, we'd sworn and taking the oath of allegiance before the Chief Judge of the state, before Her Excellency, before the Commissioner of Police, before the Chairman of the NYSC Governing Board, before the State Coordinator, before all the guest of Honour, before the soldiers and Man O' War, before ourselves; before the Nation Nigeria and before God Almighty. If we contravened the law, that means we were liable to sanction. This was a once in a lifetime event and so it was meant to be so special an event that couldn't be forgotten in a hurry. Several other events ensued. The speech given by Her Excellency was based on promises of what would be done for us the Corps members in order that our stay in the unknown land would be a memorable one.

"Ekiti is a Virgin State", she told us.

"...viewed against the chaos of Modern development. Ekiti is where you want to come for harmony and a shot at new opportunities. The life here she says, is very African". "Here, you are still woken in the morning by cocks crowing and birds chirping in a nearby bush. The people of Ekiti State, called the Ekitis, are accommodating and courteous and for the businessman: a cooperative and highly conducive base. There are great business opportunities here too."

She also gave us a brief historical background of the virgin state. "Created on October 1, 1996. It was a day the Nigerian nation was celebrating her 36th year of sovereignty. The state was carved out of what constituted the entire Ekiti Zone of the Ondo State. Today the Young

State comprises sixteen Local Government Areas. It is one of the thirty-six states plus Federal Capital Territory that makes up the Republic of Nigeria. The Ekitis form one of the largest groups in Yoruba land. Their ancestors migrate from Ile Ife, the spiritual home of the Yorubas. Culturally, Ekitis are homogenous. The people reside in towns located within and around hills and valleys. Indeed, the name Ekiti means 'Hills'. Like most Yorubas, the Ekitis live mainly in towns. The large centres are usually compact settlements. The major towns are; Ado, Efon Alaaye, Ikere, Aramoko, Ijero and Ikole all have a common suffix, Ekiti. The state capital is Ado-Ekiti'. "Hmmm...! Where we were was Ise/Orun Local Government on a campground where we were confined for 21 days. But my sight to and around the state as I proceeded to the camp was engulged with a pack of beautiful and hilly scenery".

Further more, in her address, she'd told us about the location and boundaries of the state. "Ekiti State is situated in the hearth of the tropics. It is located between longitudes 4.45 to 5.45; east of the Greenwich Meridian and Latitude 7.45 to 8.5 north of the Equator. It shares boundaries with the South of Kwara and Kogi States and east of Osun State. To its east is Edo State and its south is Ondo State. The state is mainly an up land zone. It rises over 250metres above sea level. It lies with a beautiful area underlain by metamorphic rocks of the basement complex. It has a synthetically undulating land surface. Its landscape consist of ancient plane broken by steep-sided out-crops dome rocks. These rocks may occur singularly or in groups or ridges. The most notable of these rocks are found in Efon-Alaaye, Ikere-Ekiti and Okemesi-Ekiti. These towns also house some of the most interesting hills in the state. The state is also endowed with great water resources. These help the communities in sourcing a living

and also recreation. Most popular among these rivers are Ero, Osun, Ogbese and Oni.

The Ekitis speak a Yoruba dialect known as Ekiti. However, among them, the Ekiti dialect is spoken with slight variations by the different communities. In spite of this, all Ekitis understand themselves regardless of the dialect slant. There are three main religious faiths practiced in the state. They are Christianity, Islam and the traditional religion. Ekiti State is administered as a part of modern Nigeria. It has a democratically elected Governor, Deputy, the Judiciary and the Cabinet Commissioners at the helm of affairs. At the grassroots there are local government authorities. You can see that there are a whole lot of goodies that this state has to offer to you. I only hope you'll grasped every opportunity in the state and make for yourself a memorable stay. And those of you that are males, Ekiti females are very beautiful and homely. I employ you to get entangled before you leave this state". Her speech came to an abrupt finish. She'd inspected all that was needed and made promises likewise.

Sooner than we expected, the ceremony had come to an end and we were dismissed only after the dignitaries had surveyed the environment with Her Excellency at the forefront.

CHAPTER FOUR

The campground had its first very busy day. The ceremony was just some hours ago. We'd all been relieved of our four hours of tedious standing under the severe sunburn. Some slight body aches especially at my loins. That was apparently the first time I'd had to stand for four hours uninterrupted. The ceremony came up in a grand style. We'd gone to change into our compound wears. The whites glittered in every nooks and cranny of the campground.

It was lunchtime already. Corps members had already started trooping to the cafeteria with their lunch boxes. I hurried to get my meal ticket to join the queue. The more you delayed the longer the queue became. That was the first time also that I was going to queue up for food. The cafeteria had a good number of hungry Corpsers already. It was a long file of three rows with three big pots and three servers and three inspectors who ticked our meal tickets to make sure that we didn't come back for another ration. "What did they make for lunch?" I wondered. It was beans and garri that hot afternoon. "What a combination?" I was already losing appetite knowing what food it was for lunch

and that that was a meal I detest eating outside my home. I'd make do with beans and a loaf of bread instead. The hall had a lot of complaining Corps members who were comparing what was given to their counterparts in other camp grounds in other states as well as tongue lashing the cooks of the meals. Thank God we'd been pre-informed that there was going to be what they called inter-platoon competitions. And we've been told that cooking was going to be a part of the competition. Those who thought they were better would be tested. The inter-platoon or whatever it was called would be commencing as part of the camp activities, the next day. The first time I'd come across the word 'Platoon' was a film that starred Michael Dudikoff - 'Platoon Leader' was the film, an action packed movie of soldiers in a regimented barracks. We were under the nose's of the military men, when the time comes, we'd know better. I'd collected my own ration after standing on the queue for about fifteen to twenty minutes and headed to the hostel.

I noticed in front of the 'OBS' was a crowd of Corpers. What they were there for I didn't know but I was going to inquire after my meal. "Always seek information from the 'OBS'" we've been told. It wasn't much of a meal but an appetizer as it was just a scoop. I did justice anyway. I couldn't go back for another ration even though I wasn't filled but some dogged gluttons went for more like Oliver Twist.

I started off to the 'OBS' to find out what gathered some Corps members there. It was the submission of passport pictures for I.D. card procession.

Only two recently taken coloured passport pictures with full names and the state code written at the back that was needed to be submitted.

"Come back the next morning for collection of your I.D. card or we'll announce it when its ready. Just submit your pictures and go". Those in-charge of the procession told us. They were Corps members like us but they'd been chosen by the P.R.O. I'd love to be part of them. At least, let me keep myself busy when at leisure. So I asked one of the guys how I could be part of them.

"You want to be part of us?" He asked me and grinned in a rather silly manner that showed he was ridiculing me.

"Yeah!" I replied.

"Oh...oh! No vacancy!" He said and the others laughed. I felt embarrassed. I needn't have bothered.

"It is just a selfless service. No gain" the corps member who'd come to submit his passport told me. "They are taking it like government work. Oh boy, you no need to join them".

"Where's your passport?" The nitwit who'd ridiculed me asked me. I ignored and walked away, I hadn't any recent passport pictures. The only one left I'd used on my meal ticket. I headed to the direction of the photographers.

"Take me passport picture". I told one of the photographers who called himself corner stone.

"How many copies?" He asked me.

"How much for four copies?"

"N300.00. But you can pay N500 for 8 copies".

"Just take me the four copies. Can I get it this evening?"

"No, you'll get it before 8.00am tomorrow morning."

"O.K! just snap me" He adjusted his camera, told me to walk a little into the field.

"It's OK!" He said and he snapped. "You can pay all amount now or a deposit of N200.00".

"I'll give you N200.000 now. I'll complete the payment tomorrow when I collect the pictures. Make sure its fine".

"No wahala! Just trust me. You can check out my collections" He gave me a handful of his collections. "They are okay". I handed back the collections to him and wondered away to where the United Bank of Africa (UBA) was situated underneath the Neem tree just in front of the camp store. There were other banks like, Oceanic bank, Bank PHB, GTB etc.

"Hello! I greeted.

"Hello! Greeted back the man in suit that learned on the Buick saloon car.

"How may I help you?"

"Can I make withdrawal?"

"Sure you can. But you cannot get the money today".

"When would it be?"

"Tomorrow, tomorrow in the afternoon when you see us".

"Do you come on Saturday?"

"Oh No! I didn't remember. You'll get it on Monday".

"What is the procedure?"

"Quite easy if you have an account already wit us. You write your name in full, your account number and the amount you want to withdraw and sign twice. That's all. The man told me".

"I do have an account but wouldn't you be needing my I.D. card?" I asked him.

"Not at all." He handed me the book and a pen and I wrote and signed. The man was friendly. If that guy at

the 'OBS' was this friendly and or if people would be this friendly and generous, then the world would have been a better place.

Some corps member who'd no account had come to crowd around the table.

"Line up!" The man who sat on the chair told them. I left the scene and went back to my hostel. They have been looking for me it seemed as two or three guys had inquired about my where about. One had a pen and a book with him. "I've been around I told them".

"O.K. we need you to bring N20.00. Everybody's contributing so we can buy an extension socket to enable us charge our phones. This one socket cannot do for the about 56 guys in this hostel. Those who don't comply will not be allowed to charge their phones".

"How would you detect?" I asked myself supposed I didn't comply. I complied anyways to avoid further talk or quarrel.

"Who's your Bunkie? The guy who I'd given the money by name Ken asked me.

"It's Austin. You can see he's not around".

"Pay for him and collect your money from him when he turns up". I stupidly did as I'd given them N50.00 note.

"I'll give you your N10.00 later". And they walked on to the next. The collection of the token amount ended up in fracas between Ken and a stubborn head fellow who thought the collection was exploitation and that there was no need.

When it came to money and food, people's attitude suddenly turns barbaric and wild. The best bet is to know how to deal with them.

"I don mark your face. I don mark you ...00. If we see your phone for that socket, we go brake am" Ken warned the dude.

"You no fit try am. If you talk too much, buy that socket and I go charge my phone for your front". The thick skulled dude replied pointing at Ken sternly.

"See this guy oo.... You be person papa?". He continued to lament in the room. I'd already jumped on my bunk laying my head on my pillow. I was thinking about several things. One of such things was my stay on Ise/Orun Camps ground until the completion of the twenty-one days. How I wished that the day would come in a jiffy. Several thought went through my mind. I'd heard a lot about NYSC Camping life. How Corps members lavished money at the mammy market gulping bottles of liquor and how there was the possibility of screwing around in the open field. I'd only witnessed those who drank to stupor but haven't yet seen a guy and his babe screwing on the open field. That would seem very absurd if it ever does happen. But I doubted the possibility of such a situation as there were a lot of soldiers and Man 'O' War patrolling the campground like German shepherds and they were very strict at chasing us into our rooms when it was lights out.

It would only be possible if the soldiers engaged in such animalistic acts. But it did happen in other camp grounds nation wide. I've heard and read of situations where two Corpers who were caught in the act were sanctioned and evicted from the Camp.

Was this a true story or was it 'Cock and Bull'? I wouldn't know because I only read in one of the 'kopa mirror', a monthly publication of the NYSC.

My camp was only but fresh. Lets hope as time went on, the guys and babes may flout orders and indulge

in such an illicit misconduct. I'd only be glad to be a voyeur. Afterall, there'd be no crime in voyeurism.

Some of the guys had complained about how some girls were leaving on the expense of their boyfriends at the mammy market during dusk. I'd witnessed such scenarios but it was no business of mine poke nosing.

I was still lying on the mattress when I took to sleep in that noisy and rowdy room. That was the least I could do at that time afterall, there were no activities except when the beagle sounded. Whatever tune it was, we responded accordingly.

I'd not looked at the time on my chronometer before falling into oblivion. Barely 20 minutes or so into my sleep was a clarion call.

We'd started complaining, there was hardly a time the beagle sounded that we didn't complain.

"What were they calling us for again?" I was infuriated. If I had my way, I'd ignore the call and just continue with my sleep.

It was evening, about 5.30pm. As I opened my eyes, it was my wristwatch that caught my glance. I grunted and murmured and banged my legs on the mattress and the double-decked bunk shook. My grunting and murmuring was futile. Nobody cared, even if I fell down from the bunk, it was to my own detriment. I lazily sat on the bunk to gather momentum before joining my counterparts.

The R.S.M. had ordered us to file up almost forming a circumference. All the soldiers could be seen except for the camp commandant. The R.S.M strolled around with heavy thuds and arms crossed at his back. He looked everyone eye ball to eye ball as though we'd contravened the law and as though he was trying to

pinpoint the victim or victims that had defaulted. "You!" He pointed at a guy who had a dark shade on.

"Out!"

One of the corporals who was walking side by side with the R.S.M. pulled the boy out. He staggered but quickly gained balance and stood in the middle of the incomplete circumference. "Next, you, join him". It was a fat pot belied fellow that looked like a pregnant woman. The fellow strolled out ponderously in a swift gait until he got to where the first guy stood. As he walked, the female Corporals at the other curve of the half circle we'd formed laughed as the pot-bellied fellow swayed with his bulgy tummy.

More male Corporals were asked to join the train. We hadn't any idea why those guys were fished out. Some said it was because they were very big in size. Come to think of it, the about eleven or twelve guys that were out already were big and could weigh about 80-90kg. Some said, may be they committed crimes and some others said, perhaps their ages were above thirty. As it was against the rule to come for the NYSC when one was already thirty and above. Several talks here and there.

When the selection had gotten to twenty male Corporals, the R.S.M. asked the Corporal to take the guys to a corner and called one of the Man 'O' War to be the assistant and he called that Platoon I.

The selection went on. He picked more and more guys. It was strictly guys. He'd separated the guys from the girls, which was very unusual in the parade ground. He 'picked and chose' until he picked me. Join them. He commanded. I hadn't any curse to fret as I did when the selection first started, as it was just a formation of Platoons like placing us in a class of our own instead of the whole population. He selected another twenty of us and asked us

to follow the next soldier he'd called and a Man 'O' War as an assistant.

"Come this way", the soldier man beckoned the twenty of us. We were a collection of different breeds. The fat-short, fat-tall, slim-tall, slim-short, dark skinned, fair complexioned, we were of all manner in my Platoon, Platoon II. The soldier man asked one of us to bring out a sheet of paper so we scribbled our names. We did that.

"I am Corporal Amos Babatunde of the Nigerian Army. I am now your Platoon commandant and the Man 'O' War here is my assistant. He'll introduce himself to you later on. We're only but twenty here abi? Many more shall be joining us, before the end of the selection. Like, your female counterparts would be part of us. I am a simple man if you want me to be simple but I may sting if you mess with me. You mess with me when you don't take to my instructions and when you flout my orders. Sharing you into Platoons is for us to keep very close watch on you and for you to partake in all activity this Orientation has to offer to you. Any form of flippancy would attract severe punishment and I for one would be very much obliged to deal with you. For your information, there shall be attendance. So if you think you can dodge Platoon activities, you have yourself to blame. The attendance register shall be with me and your own selected platoon leader. Some of the activities shall be inter-platoon competitions comprising of cooking competition, Dance and Drama, parade and sports and other games. I'd take you strictly on parade, as that's my area of utmost interest. Everyone of you must take all activities very seriously. There shall be scores and awards in all of these activities. If out of your own unseriousness, this platoon does not emerge with flying colours, you have yourself to blame. Henceforth, at the sound of the beagle, you're to gather as

a platoon and not as you've been gathering. The spot where you're to assemble is beside the goal post just after platoon 1. Have I made myself clear." He pulled his ears to drive home his seriousness. The selection by the R.S.M. went on. He'd gotten up to platoon 10 with twenty-two in each platoon. When he had gotten to platoon 8 and asked the Guerilla to head the platoon, the guys he'd chosen for that platoon where overwhelmed with enthusiasm and many more had wished to be a member of the Guerilla's platoon. The Guerilla with his twenty-man platoon galloped along in his usual manner as the crowd raved in an unusual gusto.

"Shut-up! Shut up!!" The soldiers and Man 'O' War who'd not been given a platoon ran around to calm the hailing crowd. The crowd kept mute and the selection continued. The Guerilla had gathered his twenty-man platoon and was giving instructions to them just like my platoon commandant did. What the Guerilla told them, I did not know. But I supposed it was similar to what my commandant told us.

The total number of platoons where sixteen in all and sixteen soldiers and sixteen Man 'O' War as assistants for those platoons. At the end of the selection, we'd numbered up to a hundred and twelve in my platoon – Platoon 2, with both male and female Corpers, the old and young, the slim and fat, the tall and short, the black and fair, the good, the bad and the ugly – all and sundry.

Platoon 2, had turnout to be a one big family. It was time we mingled and acquainted ourselves. Out of the hundred and twelve of us, it was only about two or three of the guys that I knew by name. They were Ken, the guy who'd collected ₦50.00 from me to buy an extension socket. The others were Peter, a dark handsome dude with an athletic physique and Jombo. There was none that I

knew that was from my institution. I was the only person from the Niger Delta University. The other eleven must have been scattered in other platoons. Like my girlfriend had fallen into Platoon six and then Onome, Platoon 1 and Harry, Platoon 8-the Guerillas platoon.

Acquaintance in my Platoon went on. There were two female Corpers who thought they were the order of the day, talking nineteen to the dozen, flared up to show their intrepidity. They chorused some of the platoons chants, jumping around, clapping in a bid to hypen the platoon. They chanted on, ridiculing that the guys in the platoon had been too moody for their liking. It was good though, but the way they'd sprung up to lead the platoon was what I disliked. I could not contend with girls with such demeanour. Wait until you're appointed. That was my kind of person. Anyways, the platoon seemed to appreciate the chants and they sang along. The chants kept rolling one after another until the platoon commandment stopped us.

"The competition for inter-platoon cooking shall commence tomorrow, starting with platoon one. You're next after platoon 1. That means, you've got to get things started immediately. I detest procrastination. This announcement you shall hear formally tomorrow. I'm only communicating to you now, to single you out. I want the best from you and you'll get the best from me only if you cooperate. Your cooperation is mandatory. This goes to everyone of you I know some of you would hide under the shadows of others whilst the others work. If you are caught wanting, I shall treat you like a bloody civilian who contravenes the law. In the military, we do not tolerate flippancy. Our watchword is, 'Discipline', I have been mandated to discipline you when you flout orders?"

"Was he trying to scare us to show his strictness or what was his aim?" My platoon members had begun to wonder. As we looked around, there were the other platoons jumping and chanting away their choruses, while we gathered around listening to strict warnings. If it was for my platoon to emerge the best that those warnings were given to us then I had no problems. I'd always liked where 'success' was the watchword, where seriousness was the order of the day. That was the reason for my lack of interest in being a member of the Guerilla's platoon while my counterparts thought that would have been a place for unending fun. More and more stern statements emitted from the mouth of the platoon commandant.

"I am going to choose for you a temporary platoon leader. You shall elect your own platoon leader at our next meeting".

The guy who'd turned out his own note so that we scribbled our names and state code numbers was chosen.

"He shall be your platoon leader for now. Introduce yourselves to your colleagues" The commandant told the chosen one.

"My name is Amadi Adigwe". The light skinned dude introduced. He had some good leadership qualities. His oratory skill was splendid even much more than the commandant, he'd a great deal of charisma and he was very much poised. If he became the platoon leader, no regrets I guessed.

"The platoon leader shall reach me directly whilst every complains you have shall first be communicated to your platoon leader. Every information regarding to this platoon shall be communicated to your platoon leader who in turn relates to you in my stead". The platoon commandant kept on in his instructions. Some of the

platoons had been dismissed. My platoon and a few remained still getting information.

"On no account, I repeat. On no account should anyone of you whose name is on my list, leave this platoon to another. If you do...!" He curtly said.

We were dismissed. We weren't the last platoon to be dismissed anyways. Platoon's 1 and two or three others were still chanting and chorusing away.

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'Twas' a new weekend with a new morning. It was quite bright and fair and breezy that morning as the wind fluttered away the dried leaves from the Neem and Gmelina trees that were planted around the campground. It was quite a busy morning too. Several Corps members filed out with their dirty clothing. It was a bid of dry cleaning. The perspirations from our bodies and the dirt of the earth from the everyday tedious physical trainings that clogged on our t-shirts and briefs must be washed thoroughly for another routine of the P.T. There were laundry ladies in my room from the mammy market collecting dirty clothing from some of the lazy fellas for only a token amount I'd called one of the dry cleaners that we knew as Mama Kemi, to come for my clothing. I gave her all that was dirty except for my dress. The money she asked for was quite fair. I'd paid only a N100.00 for about six dirty clothes plus my jungle boots, my pair of white canvass and stockings.

"Wetin be your number?", she asked me. I told her my number and she wrote with a marker on every item I'd given her so she could easily identify which item belonged to which Corps member or the other.

"I go bring am for evening". She said after packing them into a blue 'Ghana must go bag' that she'd come

with. She lingered around the bunk of one other fellow who beckoned to her.

I lazed out of my room after I'd finished conversing with the laundry lady. I was heading to the 'OBS' to submit my passport pictures for the procession of my NYSC Identify Card. On my way, there were talks of emoluments that was due to us. It was for every Corps member but only those who'd gotten their NYSC I.D Cards that could go for theirs. The emolument we were paid was of three categories. These included the transport allowance of ₦1,000.00, the Bicycle allowance of ₦500.00 and the monthly allowance of ₦8,500.00 which was not due to us then. Those who heard the announcement and had their I.D ready were to go for the collection of their transport allowance.

I approached the 'OBS' for the procession of my I.D and there I met one of the loquacious girls in my platoon that had led us into chanting and chorusing the other day. She was the tall beautiful one that I'd transferred most of my hatred to. She was one of the attendants at the 'OBS'. I recognized her but I was skeptical if she'd met me before. "What can I do for you?" She asked me.

"I brought my passport" I handed the pictures to her. She examined them and handed the pictures back to me.

"Write your names and state code at the back" She said. I complied and gave her the copies again.

"Come back in an hour or two for your I.D card", she muttered. She looked friendly and welcoming. I pondered about asking her the same question I'd asked the nitwit I met the other day. Suppose she made a fool of me. Like her fellow 'OBS' crew member did, I thought.

"Excuse me a second", I called her attention. "Yes, You! Just a second outside".

"O.K.!" She stood up from the seat and approached me.

My heart thumped as she walked out of the office towards me. I had a very strong phobia for embarrassment especially when it was from the female folk.

"How may I help you?" She inquired.

"Not so much of a big deal. Just wanted to know how I could be part of you", I said. Even though she was going to act the fool or silly, I was unmindful because I was talking to her one on one.

"Hmm..." She paused a while and grinned. "You'll have to meet the P.R.O. then. She recruited us into this forum. Maybe I'll help you talk to her or maybe we'll talk to her together. But I don't think she'd need any new hand. She's sent some like you away". Her accent was superfluous and her diction - queens.

"Maybe I just want to be part of those in the studio giving announcement and not part of those processing I.D. I'm acting by the announcement I heard some days back requesting entertainers to meet with the P.R.O." I told her.

"In that case, you'll have to see the P.R.O. alone. She'll attend to you, but she's not on seat now. You may have to go and come back. And for your information, those you think are part of the studio are still those processing I.D cards. She said.

"Oh... pardon my ignorance.

"No scrubs!" She muttered. "I'd like to get feed back when you meet her".

"No probs", I'll relay back to you. She turned to leave. "Wait a while. You're platoon 2?"

"Yeah, how'd you know?" She was baffled

"I'm Platoon 2 also. Call me Morris". I extended my right hand for a shake. She returned back the shake with a smile that exposed the dimples on either sides of her cheeks.

"Marilyn!"

"It's been a pleasure talking with you Marilyn. Thanks for your time" I decided to let her go before those Corpers who queued for the submission of their passports would strangled me.

"Nice talking with you. Don't forget to feed me back." She told me with a grin that displayed her set of well-arranged dentition.

"You bet". I bade her and walked away. Platoon 1 has been given the kitchen to manage for that day. The inter-platoon cooking was to begin with them. Their recipe for the day wasn't our business. Whatever they prepared and offered, we consumed. The preparations began so early in the morning even before the clarion call. Their preparations weren't much of a concern to us especially to me. The only importance amongst others that the inter-platoon cooking competitions conferred to us were that, we had larger rations and we could go twice or more times according to how we maneuvered. Double rations was very much possible now that our own persons would be in the helm of affairs – ticking of meal tickets and serving. More explanations would be given when it got to my Platoon's day.

I got to the P.R.O. later that day as I promised Marilyn. I got a very positive comment from her that fascinated me. Perhaps, my accent and diction. She'd told me to go into the studio, which was out of bounds to non-'OBS' members for an audition.

"Mr. Toyin, please audition this Corper.

"Go into the studio". I went into the studio. It was a small room of about 10 x 12 in size with a big desk that had the amplifier, the public address system, microphones, a laminator, pile of books at a corner of the room, a standing fan, some KGM plastic chairs and a bench and two guys and a girl. The girl was Marilyn and the guys, one was by name- Ken, the studio manager and the other was Richard, the studio engineer. Marilyn was the one on the microphone. It was the evening shift and it was her own program on the frequency. I hardly didn't recognize her in that headphone when I first saw her. So, she was the one with that angelic voice I was always hearing.

"The only one – miss lady 'M' on your darling frequency".

"Yeah! She was the one – The lady 'M' I'd always heard about. She was still voicing in the microphone when Mr. Toyin instructed Ken to give me a try. "Handle Him!" I was handed another microphone and I was told to say something.

"I'll listen to you outside". Said Mr. Toyin.

"Wow!", I gasped. "What do I say?", I had a many thought.

"Yo... Yo! This is the Orientation Broadcasting Service. The voice you're hearing is the voice of your anchor- Boy Morrigan. I'm hanging out in the studio; with me, myself and I. The program that you're tuned unto is

"Wow.... wow! Splendid" Marilyn snapped.

The guys in the studio were thrilled.

"You've got a great voice on the microphone. Ever ran a radio or T.V program before?" The studio manager asked me.

"Not at all", I told him. But I remember doing a pilot on a program sometimes in Glory F.M. It was my

first audition in a radio station. I didn't tell them that but that, I had not at all but was a freak when it came to listening to the F.M. dials.

"You'll do well for a presenter, I'll talk to the P.R.O. on your behalf. Have you got a program?"

"Yeah! Maybe one or two".

"Then, you'll have to talk to me about them. Look at that." He pointed at the program list pasted on the wall. "We lack programs. Hope what you've got is different from what we have".

I scanned through the scanty list. "You bet!" I was feeling good that I'd been complimented. The P.R.O. had opened the studio to know what was going on. She'd been listening from outside.

"Do you recommend him?" She asked the studio manager. Then he's part of us. Get ready for the Miss Coca-Cola beauty pageant. She slammed back the door. I'd become a member of the 'OBS' and for my voice to be aired, I've got to have something exclusive. I'll think about it? There was a gathering of my Platoon. The Platoon leader had summoned us for a brainstorming on how we would be exhibited and peculiar as a Platoon in the on-going inter-Platoon cooking competition.

The issues on ground for deliberation were, the recipes for the three square meals, supplements for the various recipe, personal contributions in cash and kind and sub-division of the Platoon, including decoration of the refectory. We were splitted into three sub-groups of A, B and C of about thirty-five of us in each group.

I'd fallen into group A. My group was meant to be in charge of the Breakfast whilst Group B would decorate the refectory at the time we were preparing breakfast and Group C, served the meal for breakfast that morning. Those in group B were ordained with making lunch at

noon as those in C decorated and cleaned the refectory whilst my Group - 'A' served. And then for supper, Group C was to handle that whereas Group A, decorated and Group B - served. It was a great sense of division of labour. Every hand must be on deck for effective result.

The meals for the periods as given on the timetable were Tea and Bread for breakfast, Yam and Beans for lunch and Eba and Melon Soup for dinner. That was the course for Platoon 2. There were the selection for volunteers that would go shopping at the market, and volunteers for artistic designs on Cardboards to be pasted in and out of the refectory. I'd volunteered for the artistic decorations but the cardboards and colour pens should be made available. One other fellow had also volunteered to assist me in the artistic designs. We were opt to surpass Platoon 1 in everything, in every ways. Their own exercise was to come to an end that evening. They've been superfluous in their meals, organization, service and comportment especially being the starters of the inter-Platoon cooking competition. Where they defaulted, others would thrive upon. But special considerations would be accorded to them as we were told on the parade ground.

The night of that day prior to lights out, myself and three other guys in my platoon engaged ourselves with calligraphing on the cardboards. "Welcome to Platoon 2 Kitchen Corner", "Great Taste! Only the Tongue can tell", "Irresistible Meals - Ooolalacious!" These and more were the calligraphy on the cardboards. We were to paste them very early, the next day. Those who volunteered to go shopping had gone already taken permission from the Camp Director. Marilyn was the Master minder even for the interior décor of the refectory. The day broke too quickly as usual. The parade ground was occupied by all and sundry in Platoon basis but Platoon 2 had a grace to be

exempted. Those who were for breakfast had woken up at about 4.00am to put the kitchen in order. My group was for breakfast but I'd subjected to being in protocol, ensuring that there was orderliness amongst the Corps members when they came for their meals. The decorations in the hall commenced by 6.00am when the morning was gradually becoming bright. We started with sweeping the left-over jargons and designs of Platoon 1 and ours were put in place. I'd pasted the cardboards on strategic parts in the hall.



Platoon 2

We'd demarcated the hall into six rows and columns with ribbons tied to the pillars that held the ceiling. There were three entries and three exits. We opted for orderliness and we must get it. That was one of the criterion for out-witting your counterparts in the cooking - competition. Others were: How time conscious we were for the various meal courses. Breakfast was usually by

8.00am, lunch by 1.00pm and dinner by 7.00pm. Another was the taste and management of the meals so that it got to every Tom, Dick and Harry including the officials. The cleanliness of the refectory and the kitchen was another criteria. The decorations in the hall included beautiful flowers that were plucked from the nearby bushes and balloons tied on the pillars in the hall.

It was Tea and Bread that morning and so we needn't waste time in its preparation. It only required boiling the water and putting the beverages. The loaves had already been supplied in bags. We only waited for the beagler to blow the meal tune so that the Corps members would come for their breakfast. It wasn't much of hardwork preparing breakfast. We'd taken our positions. Those of us that were protocol officers dressed in white upon white with our face cap and a protocol tag pinned on our T-shirts. The servers were six. Three guys and three girls. A guy and a girl to each big pot containing the brown water and a bag of loaves so that one served the brown water and another served buttered loaves.

The meal tune sounded anyways and the gluttonous Corpers that knew how to keep to time had scurried into the refectory to avoid the crowd. Some strolled in ponderously in a majestic swift gait. The rule was 'First come, first serve'. But first comers were usually unfortunate as the servers in the bid to make sure everybody got a tip of the iceberg must cut down on excesses but they were fortunate as they conserved their own time instead of whiling away on the queue. Sometimes, those who were the last had larger share of the meals and or even be without at other times. Then it was better that one was neither the first sets nor the last. But in either ways, if your person was serving or ticking you were sure to come back for more. It was safer if your

person was ticking than serving as you may be noticed and embarrassed.

Such was the case when my room-mates in other platoons had noticed the row in which I took charge in the ticking of meal tickets that they'd related to one another to follow my lane as I would untick their meal tickets so that they came twice or more times. And if I complied not, I was done for when I got back to the room. It was great fun partaking in such an exercise of service. I knew I was only going to partake in breakfast alone after which I'd retire to my room or to the 'OBS' afterall I now had a place I could while away my precious time. "Lunch and Dinner would be handled by those who were responsible".

CHAPTER FOUR

*W*e'd entered the second week. Call it week two but it wasn't yet a fortnight.

Gradually, we were experiencing a mixed grill of fun and despair. If there was any fun at all in this stern looking environment with hungry battalion always wanting to instill discipline, it was in this week according to Corps members who'd had the foreknowledge of camping life. The activities was getting the more loaded as the days passed by. We were to be attending lectures whether we liked it or not and the inter-platoon competitions took a new shape.

There was to be volleyball competition amongst the female Corpers in the various Platoons and football, for the male counterpart and Dance and Drama and scrabble and chess and others for both genders. It was only football and volleyball that had gender inequality that I wondered about. Talking about the cooking competition, Platoons 3 through 10 was to manage the kitchen for that week. My Platoon have had a successful outcome as there were commendations from the officials on the parade ground the day before, that threw my Platoon into a wild excitement. But the Corps members had a contrary opinion. Grieved by our service they'd complained of our

paltry attitude towards them especially during lunch. Only a piece of boiled yam and a scoop of beans for each famished Corpor. It wasn't our fault anyways. We were only being miserly trying to cut our coat according to our cloth so that all and sundry had a taste of the National Cake. Come to think of it, even if they'd had their lunch boxes filled and even if satisfaction was guaranteed, one or more person would still stand as a critic, criticizing what we did. That was always the case when dealing with humans. There must be a propelling statement that would ignite one to doing things better. Or else, how then would the world be a better place? It would get to their turn what we told them. But if the P.R.O. had commended us publicly at the parade ground, then, we do not give a hoot what the Corps members felt. Afterall, the assessments were from the official themselves.

I'd thought about what programs to introduce to the 'OBS'. They were three; 'Soul Serenade' – A mind blowing program centered on 'LOVE' 'RELATIONSHIP' and 'LIFE'; A music count Down and a 'Shout Out' – A medium where Corpers could reach out to their loved ones to let them know how much they cared for them.

Those were the programs I was to introduce. I matched to the 'OBS' to make my intention known to the studio manager. As I approached the 'OBS', there was Marilyn smiling so sheepishly at the doorway with both arms resting on the doorframe. I wondered if the smile was to me but I reciprocated anyway. "How are you doing?" I greeted, as I got closer to her. She ignored as she was still talking to the person who induced her into smiling. The smile wasn't to me afterall. It was to that dude who'd embarrassed me when I first inquired to be a part of the 'OBS'. He was Obiora Oduma by name. I'd seen him laughing away spreading out the moustache on the top of

his upper lip almost touching the lobes of his ears. He was sitting on that long bench with hands on the desk just in front of him amongst other 'OBS' crew. I ignored her as I noticed she was carried away in the hysteria of whatsoever gist and walked straight into the 'OBS' underneath her spreaded arms.

"Hey! Stop there!" Obiora, noticing my presence lamented.

"Me?" I touched my chest with my forefinger to be rest assured it was me he was talking to. Others had kept mute as Obiora's voice roared out.

"Yes! You! You're not allowed to come in here!" He told me. Not so surprised by his impolite attitude I told him I hadn't come to see him and I walked on pushing open the studio door without saying a word of 'Hello' to the others even though I'd minded at the first instance.

"Who is that guy?" he asked, getting up from the bench to approach me.

"Oh! Morris? He's part of us. He was recruited into this fold yesterday". I overheard Marilyn's voice inside the studio talking to him.

"Is that why he had the effrontery to ignore my question?" I was still overhearing them talking about me. I'd thought the fellow would come to encounter me inside the studio but I had waited in vain until Marilyn bashed open the door. There were four of the 'OBS' members inside the studio when I got inside. There was the studio engineer and three others that I hadn't met before. Now we were six. Three guys and three girls. The only girl that I knew by name then was Marilyn and so I acquainted myself with the others. Apart from the studio engineer the other guy by name Joachim, was the one operating the laminator whereas the two females other than Marilyn that just joint us were the one's putting the Cards and passports

into the films. They were Sharon Atseyinku and Constance Amadi.

Nobody was on the microphone as there was the Independent and Corrupt Practices Commission's lecture going on at the Reg. Hall at the time. I inquired after the whereabouts of the studio manager but I was told he'd attended the ICPC lectures in the Reg. Hall. I remained in there giving a lending hand to those in the duty of processing I.D Cards.

"That guy tried to embarrass you". Said Marilyn to me.

"The second time now. Does he hold any special position? Like, is he the H.O.S at the 'OBS'?" I asked her.

"Don't mind him. He's just a busy body. Go introduce yourself to him" She told me.

"I'd do no such thing. He should come acquaint himself to me instead" I'd already known his name. How I got knowing his name, I could not decipher. And I bet he didn't recognize we'd met before. I continued to slip the pictures and cards in the films as I've been shown.

"Where are you from?" Sharon Atseyinku asked me.

"Bayelsa State! Why?"

"Your accent. Have you been abroad before?"

"Not at all. Born in Lagos but stay in Abuja at the moment" I told her. She kept asking me questions upon questions until Marilyn curt in

"What program have you got?"

"Some three programs that aren't on the list. I hope they're accepted".

"If good, why not. What programs are they?" I told her the three programs in analysis.

"I love the programs. How do you intend running the soul serenade".

"Alongside any of the females here who's ready to share her love life with the Corps members". She looked at me with a grin and ended up laughing.

"That's interesting". She said still laughing.

"It promises to be a very fascinating program if I get a soul mate. Sometimes, we could invite any of the Corps members to talk about theirs too".

They all listened to me as I talked.

"I think I'll prefer the program aired on Fridays and Saturdays. The last program after the News and before lights out."

"Quite interesting". The studio engineer said grinning.

"I think I like this guy. He seems to know his onions. Where have you been all this while?"

"I've been around. I only registered late and I've been trying to catch my breath".

"I love brainstormers like you around me". He extended his forearm for a shake.

"Where did you graduate from and your discipline?"

"Niger Delta University – Economics"

"Huh! The Wilberforce Island school right?"

"Yeah"

"Nice to meet you man. You're the first from that institution I'm meeting. You're the first graduated set right?"

"Yep! Pioneers!"

"I hear you ply the water ways to your school. True?"

"Previously but not now. There's a motorable route right now".

"How was it then when it was the waters?"

"It was tremendous fun. It conferred a dynamic accolade to the school for being the only institution in the country in which her students followed the waterways to get to it. Although, a lot more even when they were freshers and sophomores wandered to some other institutions as a result of countless wreckages on the waters. It was fun to us that survived the ordeal" They all listened as I talked about my institution.



Morning P.T

"We're about twelve on this orientation ground. You'd meet one of us someday". I was referring to my girl friend. The orientation ground didn't look so rowdy as it was the previous week. Almost all had gone for the ICPC lectures. The few of us that stayed back used the name 'OBS' to save our heads. The lectures were compulsory to all Corps members. After the ICPC lecture was the Nigerian Institute for Management (NIM) and the NYSC lectures. Barely after that, we were to encounter the Man

O' War Drills. We'd already been informed of the activities for the day. Every activity started with Platoon's 1 through 16 in succession.

The Man 'O' War drills were to take place at the obstacle ground at the back of the 'OBS' and female hostel and even the Camp clinic if you were viewing from that direction. It was that obstacle Ground that the military men had warned us strictly to desist from. And it was that same obstacle ground that aroused my curiosity when I first got to camp before the warnings were given. Was it not a Man 'O' War obstacle ground that I'd seen at 'Sea School' in Lagos when I was only a kid. And even some of the drills I'd used as swing with my siblings without knowing what their importance was. Did I even dream that someday I'd have the opportunity to be involved in another obstacle ground activities? Platoon 1 was to assemble at the obstacle ground immediately after the closure of the last lecture. After them would be my platoon. We were to be fully kitted in our NYSC attire and follow suit as the Man 'O' War commanded.

We'd assembled at the parade ground in our NYSC kits responding to the beagle. It wasn't one of those usual clarion calls that assembled the whole Corps members. We've been told earlier in the morning at the first sound of the beagle that the next sound would assemble only Platoon 1 to Platoon 3.

Our Platoon commandants and Man 'O' War official gave us instructions on what we were to do when we got to the obstacle ground. It was quite an easy instruction if only we headed. All we needed to do was to be humble and take the lead of our instructors. We were ready and ready we were to take the bull by the horn. It was like we were heading to the battlefield. We were made to file up according to our height and our Man 'O' War

instructor had chorused one of the usual tunes that boosted our morals as we jogged from the parade ground to the obstacle ground.

There were various breath taking activities at the obstacle ground. And each activity or drills or whatever they were called had an instructor standing by to make sure we did the right thing. The sight was fascinating as we'd crowded the obstacle ground with gigantic trees apparently fifty years or more that sky rocketed causing dim shades in that hot afternoon. The chants and choruses were still being sung until one Man O' War official muted us. We were to see and partake something like a circus acrobatic display.

"Wee"!

"Wa!"

"Wee oo..! The Man 'O' War head, yelled out.

"Wa ...oo ... " We responded.

"You are welcome to this ground. This is called

'The Man 'O' War obstacle Ground' where wonders happen. This is a very crucial part of your camping experience. It is applicable to all Orientation Camps nation wide. The essence of this exercise is to instill discipline in you and in your future endeavour. Life's full of so many ups and downs. So many hurdles that you have to surmount to get to your proposed destination. These obstacles you see represents some of life's greatest hurdles. With discipline and dedication, the sky is the limit only to those that persevere without further circumlocutions; my boys here will take you in the drills after which you'll take turns to partake. I now hand you over to my boys". He was so brief. The message was driven home clearly. I'd not known the importance of the Man 'O' War drills until now. It was basically for perseverance, discipline and dedication. There was

eagerness amongst us, the zeal to surmount some of life's hurdles in their literary form. We were ready and equally up to the task. Afterall, it was some of our peers we'd seen in magazines and picture collections surmounting such obstacles.

"Come and see - America Wonder"

"Come and see - America Wonder", one of the Man 'O' War chanted. He was about the shortest and even the ugliest with a wide mouth like that of Hippopotamus and a misplaced dentition that must have been decayed by excessive kolanut and alcohol. He sang and we echoed clapping, whistling, dancing and even jumping as the song moved us. There were several cameramen and photographers ready to give us a snapshot.

"First and foremost, this is called, 'The Tarzan jungle rope' one of the instructors told us as he jungled with the ropes. It was a long thick rope tied vertically to the top-trunk of two massive trees and six horizontal ropes with three knots on each of those six horizontal ropes that were tied to the vertical rope against the trunks. The knots on each of the six horizontal ropes were to help one sustain grip. Those knots were tied from top, middle and bottom of each rope. The top knot enabled one's hands to grip firmly on the rope, the middle knot enabled one to support oneself quickly in case if one of the hands slipped off and the bottom knot, helped to sustain one's feet as the acrobatic displays on the ropes were on. One was to jungle from the first rope to the sixth, to surmount the obstacle.

"This other one is called 'Spider Net'. It is a broad net with box-like holes and four handle-like ropes tied in horizontal form to the top and bottom of the trunks of two other gigantic trees. That was also an obstacle. To surmount this obstacle, one was to climb with hands and feet holding and matching respectively on those box-like

holes of the net to the top after which there was a half summersault to the other side of the net in which one came down from the net using the rear with both hands and feet still on the box-like holes. The Spider Net seemed easier to handle than the Tarzan jungle rope. We'd not yet started in our freestyles, only demonstrations from our instructor. The next was a stepladder of two parallel ropes tied vertically at each end to the top and bottom of two big trunks with about fifteen to twenty rungs in between the parallel ropes. This was a ladder that started up-wards to the top trunk of one of the big trees. It was this ladder that led to the 'Net Bridge' on the height of two trees. The one tree in which the ladder ended and another tree. Another was a slanted rope in which one got down from the Net Bridge. The rope was tied from the top part of the tree where the net bridge ended and sloped downwards to the middle trunk of another tree. There were several types of obstacles on that ground. So much so that it was only the brave hearts and intrepidous one's amongst us that could surpass those obstacles. We were left to freestyle but we were sufficed to know that those obstacles we couldn't surmount were no do or die affair. As there have been cases in which some Corps members in a bid to impress one another had crash-landed, breaking an arm or foot in the cause.

I'd been able to scale through only three or four. The one's I'd had opportunity to partake in. It was difficult or almost impossible for one to engage in all as the crowd and time was insufficient. There were snapshots to those of us who wanted to keep the exercise for memory sakes. It was time, 'Time' that has never been friends with anybody that cut us short from the greatest fun we were having since the commencement of the Orientation Camp. Or perhaps, it was the officials that were depriving us from

catching so much fun to our own satisfaction or else, what other important activities awaited us? Is it not lectures and Man 'O' War drills we were told were the order of the day? As we murmured in dissatisfaction and as the instructors told us to give way to Platoon's 3, little did we know that, that was only a tip of the iceberg. The drills still continued but no longer at the obstacle ground. Whatever was the name of the other ground, my nervousness and anxiety didn't let me recall. We matched on chanting, jogging and chorusing in our usual noisy manner with our Man 'O' War instructor leading the way. Our departure from the obstacle ground emerged the arrival of Platoon 3 chorusing and clapping into the ground.

We jogged across the field to the new ground just very close to the photography stand in high spirit and the zeal that supposedly reflected on the old cliché that says. 'All work and no play, makes Jack a dull boy'. We were already feeling invigorated by the drills at the obstacle ground as we were still ready to burn off more energy or calories, to those of us that were overweight. Radiating in our khakis, we were halted and told to pair up in twos, of a male and a female. The almost 112 of us started to pair up. Marilyn and I was the perfect match. She'd since become so close to me when I got to the 'OBS'. Infact, the Orientation ground as we did almost everything in common especially in the Platoon.

She'd come dragging me on my left arm like she didn't want any other person to seize me. Even though, someone else was to seize my arm or even if I would allow any other body other than Marilyn to pair up with or if I was to be glad I was paired with, it would have been one other girl by name Komomo that I had a crush on and who was also a member of the 'OBS'. We were the only

three in my Platoon that were part of the 'OBS'. The Man 'O' War instructor oriented us on the drills, driving home the central importance to why we were doing what we were doing.

Marilyn and I were the first pair of the about fifty-one pairs we'd formed out of the Platoon.

"Go!" The Man 'O' War officer who was the head honcho of this ground commanded. We started off as the others clapped and sang. The first four or five of the obstacles of that ground were like a child's play. Like, balancing on this pole painted with the colour of the Nigerian flag, swinging on the giant-size tyre, passing in the rim and so on. The most fascinating and daunting were the thorny barb wire that was about 300m above the ground in which one was to crawl underneath using one's elbows and the tip of the toes. An overweight person, or a female with a protruding buttocks or a pot-bellied fellow was unable to pass through, as the wire was too close to the ground. One was to keep pace with one's partner as one crawled through and then the lower one went to the ground, the better as the thorns could hurt one's head or back if one becomes lackadaisical. Marilyn and I were partners in progress. We were succeeding and surmount as well. At the times my pace became faster, I slowed down summoning her to forge on. And at the time we finally succeeded, we'd become so stained by the clogging mud of the earth on our khakis. This was one exercise that I'd seen in some military cantonnement during trainings. The other was a 6 feet board that stood as impediment on the aisle of the training ground before the next obstacle. One was to climb over the board to get to the other side. And where one's partner was unable to, a lending hand was given so that one's partner scaled through. Where both partners were unable to, they were ejected from

participating. Marilyn and I were determined. She was dogged as much as I was. I'd helped her in climbing the 6 feet board to the other side whilst I climbed over helplessly. It was quite an easy task for all of the guys and for some of the girls. The last hurdle and the most frustrating and challenging was the 12 feet board that stood in the height of a storey building, a doubled size of the 6 feet board. How we were to climb to the other side of the board was left to us to unravel.

"This requires team work". One of the officers told us as we stood agape trying and failing to surmount the hurdle.

"This is where team work comes to play. And everyone of you must scale through this board else your platoon would be reprimanded. How you come about the success of this test is left for you to unravel. Now, you have only 10 mins. for everyone of your Platoon mates to scale through this board. Start Now!" The officer said instructing a subordinate to raise a song. The song went on even louder than we'd ever sung before. Our morales were boosted as some of the huge fellas in the Platoon brainstormed to apply an effective strategy. Four of the huge boys in the Platoon came together to join their hands so that anyone who wanted to surmount the 12 feet board, first of all, held the shoulders of one of the boys to stand on the jointed hands of those four boys whilst they lifted the person with the individual helping to spring up to the top edge of the 12 feet board and climbing through to the other side.

I was the first amongst the 108 to climb to the 12 feet board excluding the four huge boys who were lifting. As I climb on the hands of those huge boys and as they lifted me, and as I sprung up to hold the edge of the board, I discovered that climbing to the other side was even more

horrendous than I'd imagine. I swung my legs in the slippery board left and right until I was able to balance my right foot on the edge of the board and climbing successful to the other side. The top of the board was a great height that made it look like I was viewing my colleagues from the balcony of a storey building. It was a tremendous experience for us especially for some of the female Corps members that almost crash landed but for the help of other colleagues. Some were even pushed and wedged at the buttocks to sustain them and for them to apply more grip on the board.

All of those hurdles or obstacles or impediments had their literary importance. When we'd succeeded in all the activities, we stood with our officials to take snapshots with our dirty khakis wet with sweat and dust of the earth. It turned out a memorable event. Other platoon's had theirs the following day until all platoon had the experience. Mammy market had turned out the grooviest place on the Orientation ground. Night times, especially 8.00pm till lights out was an exceptional fun. The market had become choked up in more and more canopies and thatched houses where the traders sold their wares. In this perfectly competitive environment there was no restrictions as there was easy entry and exit, except if the authorities of the N.Y.S.C. scheme would pose impediments. How the traders got into the Orientation camp would have been formal or even informal. There were those that were into the business of charging phones until the batteries were filled for a token amount especially when the Orientation Camp was without light and even when there was light, the sockets were insufficient for the numerous Corps members. Only one or two for about fifty or more bunkies in a room. Some others engaged in hairdressing and barbing, others had beer parlour where

most male Corps members lavished money, drinking to stupor. And at one of the ends underneath some thatch houses, were seamstress' who mended the oversize or undersize clothing of the corps members. And there were costermongers at the other end and the popular Mr. Biggs eatery where we went to get confectionaries and pastries and the Mama put joints that conferred a greater proportion of sellers at the Mammy market.

I was sitting under one of the canopies with Franka at one of the most populous Mama put joints – 'Madam Chop – Chop Corner', where we were doing justice to a mound of pounded yam and 'Egusi soup'. It was one of the evenings we decided to exempt ourselves from the long queue at the refectory and from insufficiency in quantity. But this was a place we got stuffed up with only a hundred bucks. We weren't the only people, several others had their girlfriends or boy friends there too, munching, chewing, licking, sipping or drinking as was the case. My girlfriend suggested we visit Madam Chop-Chop's corner instead of my regular dinning place. I'd agreed as a result of convictions from my girlfriend on how the lady had a magical finger in preparing mouth watery dishes of all sought. Her only problem was that she could easily become paranoid to her customer. She lacked the interpersonal skill of associating with customers. However, she did it, her table was always crowded by famished Corps members like Franka and I.

The evening was a cold noisy one, as it had drizzled some minutes ago. Those who operated beer parlour filled music in the air so that those Corps members that were feverish, drove off the cold with a bottle or bottles of beer and dancing to the rhythm of the music on the marshy ground.

We'd left the mammy market after some minutes and headed to the round about where we sat and talked about the Orientation camp amidst other Corps members before we retired to our rooms. I wasn't on duty that night and so I'd retired to bed on time. The dormitory was always very rowdy with one talk or another. One could only be taking to oblivion if one deafened one's ears to the unending gist and jeering from loquacious beings that crowded the room.

CHAPTER 50X

*W*hen I was taking into oblivion, I didn't know. But I remember I laid on that mattress like one or two hours gazing into the ceiling. It wasn't yet time for light outs, perhaps the unending gist. Even at that, those who'd stories to tell talked until it was the next morning.

I had put my head on the higher part of my mattress that I'd heaped with my joggers trousers since we'd not been given pillow to sleep on and my feet, I overlapped on my traveling bag until I was hypnotized.

A guy who'd drank to stupor at the mammy staggered helplessly under the influence of the liquor from his hostel or wherever he was coming from to my window to suffocate me. How his hands slid through my netted window I could not decipher and why it was me he aimed to kill I did not even know but I'd flashed back to sometimes ago when the men of the under world had come at midnight to harass my family at my dad's new house. That was only a fortnight prior to the resumption of the Orientation Camp. How one of the gangs had pointed his flashlight directly through the windows of the room where I slept. It was one horrifying experience that couldn't

escape one's memory even in a hundred years to come. A *'de ja vu'* apparently. As the fellow tried to suffocate me, I'd yelled in fright and in a bid to rescue myself, I'd flung my hand in order to hit him but had missed him and dashing my fingers to the razor end of the louvre blades and shredding my fingers as well as the blades into fragments. At that instance, my immortal soul, wherever it went reunited with my corporal body and I only discovered that I'd been in a trance that seemed more like reality. As I got up, a roommate who also slept close to the louvres, hearing the smash, jumped down from his bunk and several others who also heard the cracking sound of the louvre blades had woken up.

"What was that? Who was that? Who hit that glass?" Questions came without any answers to back them up. The room was in disarray as every guy thought there was a fight outside the window and those who were close peeped to see who it was that was engaging in the combat. Some others thought it was the soldiers brutalizing a nonentity who had contravened the rules of the camp.

Before the shrinking sound of the louvre blades, there were heavy thuds of footsteps of somebody running to find solace or of someone chasing another person and with voices also. I'd heard it in my trance or maybe I thought so and one or two guys in my room had confirmed it, attesting to my plight as I started to explain what I knew happened. Maybe it was someone who's been possessed by alcohol or by evil spirit that had made those noises.

As I finished with my explanations and as those who were able to wake up were preparing to go back to bed, I'd picked my cell phone to check the time and discovered that my fingers dripped blood and had stained my bed sheet without me knowing from the time I woke up.

So, what I hit in the dream had a repercussion in reality. My fore fingers, middle finger and the ring finger of my right hand had flesh sliced out by the louvres and deep cuts therein. I looked at the time anyways, it was 1.45am some few minutes to 2.0' clock. I had started to feel the pains at the moment I saw blood dripping off my fingers and I tore out a roll of tissue paper to wipe off the blood and to reduce it. How everything happened within the limits of seconds baffled me. Whether somebody actually came to suffocate me or it was in my dream I couldn't comprehend. Even for the fact that my next bunkmates testified to the saga made me daze in wonderment. Even though it was in reality that what happened – happened, I didn't remember crossing anybody's path for the person to want to retaliate by suffocating me. Even if I did unconsciously without knowing, the offence wouldn't have been so aggravating that the person in his right sense would want to do away with my life.

I battled with sleep that morning, as the pains wouldn't let me. I wished I was taken into oblivion again without knowing, as it was before I dreamt or before my encounter with the daredevil. I managed to doze off with the pains all over my fingers hoping not to dream again or what seemed like a dream. It was 4.30am. The clarion call, the beagler and his beagle, the soldier men, the Man 'O' War, the parade ground and everything associated with waking up that early infuriated more than annoyed me. Upon waking, there were pains all over my systems that I began to curse. How I would bathe with the severe pains in my fingers, how I'd join and partake in the morning drills and early joggings of 6km to and fro was a bizarre to me. I had gone to the bathroom and bathed without

wetting my right-hand fingers but had managed to clean off the clotted blood from around my fingers.

The soldiers had started to ransack the rooms to make sure nobody stayed behind. In that misty morning, we'd assembled again clapping, singing and dancing according to our various platoons. Thank God; there is no compulsion in clapping or even singing if not, I would have been done for.

The soldiers were looking all fierce like roaring lion seeking whom to devour. At the end of the prayers, recitation of N.Y.S.C anthem, national anthem and pledge and the daily news, the P.R.O. handed the P.A. system to the camp commandant who was looking all weird up in rage.

"Good morning, Gentlemen, Corps Members", said the commandant

"I'm sorry to announce to you the ugly incident of yesterday that some of you are aware of in which my boys and I have already planned on the disciplinary measures to take. We've been trying to instill discipline on you since the commencement of this program but our efforts have been seeming abortive. We would deal with the perpetrator of yesterday's ugly event and I'm sure it would never repeat itself".

I thought about what ugly incident it was that had come to book already. Could it be my encounter with the daredevil? Or perhaps, what I thought was a dream was actually in its corporal form.

Oh! I remember now as I've overhead side talks of my platoon mates. It was the fracas between a male Corper and one of the solidier men at the inter-platoon football competition between platoon 6 and 14. So it was true that the culprit was culpable of the crime. I'd heard it at the 'OBS' and we were supposed to compile it in the bulletin

but the story needed a 'pinch of salt' as we were uncertain about the truism of the news and the factors that were responsible for the outbreak. The side talks I was hearing became incessant. So many of the Corps members had no idea what the commandant talked about. And only a few knew what it was that transpired the day before. Whether it was true or not, it was a rumour that spreaded like a wild fire. And every rumour most of the times, had an iota of truth. Sometimes, for an event or an occurrence to become a rumour, then there must be eyewitness. And certainly there were eyewitnesses if what happened yesterday happened. They were the spectators of the match between the two platoons.

"To those of you that are stale about yesterday's ugly event, I'd tell you. But whatever that happens to the person in question would serve as a lesson to all of you. One of you slapped one of my men yesterday", said the commandant furiously.

"We will deal with that boy mercilessly and he will never forget the day he was born". The commandant told us. Whatever that transpired or whatever was the propelling force that led to the Corper slapping the military man was not disclosed to us but what I'd heard from eye witnesses of the event, was that the Corper in question in an attempt to retaliate an upsurge in the football match between a rival team mate, had unconsciously slapped the military man who was an officiating referee of the match. Whatever was the case, what the military were interested to know was that the Corper had contravened the law and must be duly sanctioned.

The morning was still dark and misty with excessive cold. Wherever the cold wind blew from, it must have alongside it, ice berg. The commandant had made his

pronouncements. We saw him whisper into the ears of the R.S.M. Whatever he must have told him were for both of them. There were like sixteen platoons. Each platoon commandant to his platoon and a Man 'O' War to each of the platoons and the camp commandant and R.S.M. and the head of the Man 'O' War and the head of the Police and the N.Y.S.C. officials. The guy in question was summoned out. He was by name, John Okodi from platoon six. A tall looking dude of about 6.2 feet in height sprang out from the group as his name was mentioned. He walked blithely to the centre of the parade ground just in front of the N.Y.S.C. officials and the camp commandant unaware of the troubles ahead of him, dazzling in his white upon white vest and briefs and white stockings and a pair of the white chocks. His visibility was made conspicuous in that dark morning as a result of what he wore. He was not a bad looking guy, a lady's delight any day, anytime.

"Kneel down!" roared the voice of the commandant

"This is the fool that shouldered up with my man.

What we'd do to him will serve as a lesson to all of you. We'd discipline you after which you'll be evicted from amongst your peers". The commandant told the dude sternly.

"Eieevah!" Yelled the crowd.

"Quiet!" The solidier men rummaged around us to make sure we were still and even threatened to deal with anyone that was found wanting. The commandant issued a command to two of the soldiers. We didn't know what he told them but we saw them emerge with two big size sacclux paint buckets filled with water that must have been kept overnight to make it chilly.

"Lie down!", shouted one of the soldiers with a bucket of water. The dude complied by prostrating flat on that muddy ground, an effect of the past evening's

drizzles. The first splash of water was from the crown of his head to the sole of his feet soaking him wet in that unfriendly weather until the bucket was empty.

"Roll! Roll back and forth, to and fro", they commanded him. One of the soldiers who had truncheon in his hands monitored him closely to make sure he was doing what he'd been ordered. The poor dude rolled back and forth like a roller coaster. We stood dumbfounded gazing at the scenario with a surge of pity that could be seen all over our faces.

"Forgive him", some of the Corps members pleaded with the plea fallen on deaf grounds. It was the image and reputation of that guy that I cared a lot about. After that public humiliation and embarrassment, how the dude would carry himself amongst his peers in the camp for the remaining part of the Orientation exercise. It was that same dignity and reputation that I cared a lot about that the soldiers were keen to decimate.

"Forgive him! Pardon him! Have mercy on him", the voices of the Corps members lamented. It was like the days of Jesus' execution at 'Golgota', how those who thought he was innocent pleaded for pardon whereas those who thought he was blasphemous pleaded that He be killed. Similar was the case at the Orientation camp that fateful day. Some thought the public catastrophe would confer a lifetime, humility and obedience on him and that if granted amnesty or pardoned, he may not only slap but do something even worse off.

"Keep rolling!" The soldiers commanded. The second bucket of water was poured on him. The pace at which he rolled was slowed by exhaustion. He must have rolled back and forth on that muddy ground for like thirty or more times if we were counting.

"Get him up!", the R.S.M. ordered the soldier who had the truncheon and who'd been keeping pace with him.

"Let him frog jump this arena", the R.S.M. told the soldier. The dude stood up staggering to gain balance until the soldier held him.

"Now, this is what you'd do". The soldier told him as he leaped up and down with his two arms on either ear. When the soldier was through with his guide, he commanded the scapegoat to do likewise.

"Double up!", he said. "One, two, one, two, one two,... hep! hep! hep!". He monitored the dude who was so dazed. As he went up and down, I counted until I'd counted up to sixty-eight before he was allowed to rest.

"Now, you have to show how remorseful you are by telling this gathering and the soldier that you will not do it gain. Say, I will not do it again", the commandant admonished him.

"I will not do it again", replied the dude gibberishingly.

"Say it aloud!" The commandant told him. You have to jog round the sixteen platoons with that statement, and, make it aloud or else you'll face my wrath; said the commandant. As the dude jogged round the various platoons tiringly, lamenting the clause. We all went into a pregnant pause as nobody did no utterance. We only stood agape feeling the humiliation was rather too inhumane and the burden had become too heavy for him to bear alone. We were entwined with heavy hearts. It was very much conspicuous in the faces of the Corps members even to the N.Y.S.C. officials but we had no say. We were in the custody of the military and every right had been conferred on them to discipline us when we defaulted.

The dude had jogged around the various platoon like ten times in that early morning cold and in those

wears that had turned heavy and stuck on his body as a result of the water that soaked them. "Stop! Crawl on your knees until you get here", the R.S.M. told the dude. He was acting on instructions from the commandant. The dude crawled to where the camp commandant and other officials stood with his head bowed downwards to his chest region.

"John Okodi", the commandant called. "Today will be your last day on this Orientation Camp and your last appearance as a Corporal serving the nation. You are hereby giving an ultimatum from now till 10am to have vacated this camp ground else what would happen to you thereafter you will not live to tell the tale".

On hearing the pronouncements, we burst out pleading unanimously.

"No Sir, Pardon him, please Sir, have mercy on him!" We cried.

"Shut up! On your knees everybody". The soldiers shouted at us approaching us with their truncheons.

The treatment had become too inhumane and grievous for us to bear. We would not allow him to be evicted after the public disgrace. Some, especially those that knew him thought he'd committed the offence unconsciously. He'd aimed to slap a fellow Corps member, which was also against the rule but had mistakenly hit the soldier man who was there to separate the fracas.

"No Sir! He must not leave. Pardon him. Forgive his non-challancy!", we cried on bended knees.

The P.R.O. was the only saving grace for that poor dude. She'd pleaded with the commandant in close terms.

"I will pardon him but his platoon will not go unpunished for not nurturing him well", said the commandant. A clear case of transferred aggression. Punishment was meted on platoon six. The innocent and

guilty alike. Franka was a victim of the torture that morning. How she'd cried for a crime she had no hand in and the pains she'd suffered was relayed to me afterwards.

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The morning had become so bright. The day's chores had commenced. The lectures had commenced at the Reg. Hall. The agony I felt in my fingers wouldn't keep me at rest. I hadn't the time for any first aid since I'd had the cuts very early in the morning before dawn. I thought of visiting the camp clinic for better treatment. That was going to be my second time. The first time was when I suffered excruciation in my bowels – (unable to excrete); in which the clinic doctor had opted on performing an enema to ease my bowel movements. It was the same doctor I'd met when I got to the clinic.

He was a Corps Member also but a medical practitioner. He'd prescribed me some drugs and plaster on my fingers. When I left the camp clinic, I proceeded to the Reg. Hall to attend a lecture. Since the announcement of the various lectures, it was the first time that I went for a lecture. There were usually three lectures in a day. When I got to the Reg. Hall, it was already filled to capacity that some of us had to sit or lean on the windowpane. The lecture that was in progress then was the Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC) – a lesson on safe driving, how to curb accidents on our roads, seat belting etc. I'd gone in for the lecture pretty late and had missed most part of it. Only 20mins out of 60mins of the duration of the lecture that I'd met. Two other lectures were ahead of the FRSC course. They were the CIPM lecture and the NDLEA.


The evening of that day had been made special. It was to be the Miss Coca-Cola beauty pageant. The contesting girls for the past four days or so have been on critical rehearsals. My girlfriend Franka Franklin was a contestant. On several occasions, we'd gone to the obstacle ground for rehearsals with a girl who'd modeled before and was also contesting for the Miss Coca-Cola crown. She was called Freda Molen. A brown skinned damsel with a face like the red evening sun and an extremely priceless heart like the precious stone, gold. She was gracefully endowed by the creator with height and physique. She was about 6 feet or even more. She'd been so streamlined like the number eight in physique that she'd become every real man's delight. And a scintillating smile that showcased a set of well arranged dentition with a gap in between the two front and upper incisor. When it was rehearsals, she'd always went to the obstacle ground with Franka for a coaching where she explained the nitty-gritty of modeling.

As the day came by, at the Reg. Hall where almost all-important events took place as a result of its large sitting space, the Corps Members had assembled to see whose head wore the crown. The contestants were twelve in number and they were representatives of the various platoons. Some platoons had no girl to represent them, therefore the number. It could have been sixteen but only twelve had emerged. Even at that, two of the contestants were from the same platoon, platoon 1. It was about 7.30pm that the event kicked-off to the fullest. The judges, the special guests of honour, the invited and uninvited guests, Corps members and the contestants in which the day was made had all been ready. Marilyn and one other fellow that I didn't know by name were the Masters of ceremony. Several events and activities were unwinded

that day. Like, I'd gone specifically to watch Franka as well as the others display their pageantry skills and also to perform as an artiste. At the end of the pageant, the head that had the best fitting was Freda Molen. She'd emerged the Miss Coca-Cola beauty queen for the 2006 batch 'B' NYSC scheme and had the star price of a 14 inch T.V set, a sorex standing fan, a set of ceramic dishes and was giving Platoon 9 an edge over other platoons with the bulk of platoon 9 screaming and jubilating at the Reg. Hall that night. The judgement by the judges for the emergent Miss Coca-Cola was accepted whole-heartedly as it was thought that the judgement was fair and satisfactory.

The first runner-up turned out to be Franka Franklin, a position that was equally well deserved. My joy knew no bounds when her name was mentioned.

CHAPTER SEVEN

ne fateful morning, the day of the week I did not remember precisely, I'd woken up early enough even without the sound from the beagle and wake up call from the announcer at the OBS, to empty my bowels. I'd hurried with my bucketful of water to my favorite lavatory in one of the boy's hostel – A bungalow with six latrines that was well built for comfort. As I got there in the midst of the dark and my flashlight in my hand, I'd discovered to my dismay that the lavatory had collapsed. How it collapsed was very much incredulous to me. Like, there had been an earthquake the night before that wrecked and demolished the building bringing its roof to touch the ground and breaking the doors and the toilets. And that, two Corpers had been trapped in the act of defecation but have been fortunate enough to be rescued by some vigilant Corps members. This tragic incident had occurred the night in which almost all Corps member was engulfed by the euphoria of the Miss Coca-Cola beauty pageant. The two victims of the ill-fated building could have wallowed into

the pit if not for the timely intervention of some 'rescue rangers' that had stayed behind in their hostels. The collapsed lavatory as we were told, was one of the newly built and commissioned lavatories for the 2005 batch 'A' Corps members and only but a year old. The contractors must have used very poor building materials or perhaps, the foundation had not been solid enough. Whatever it was that led to the collapse of the building must have rocked the foundation. As the building had been uprooted from the ground until the roof had hit the ground shattering the doors and the walls.

I had resorted to the nearby bushes that early morning even though it was against the rule of the Camp to be found in and around the bushes. I'd not cared. There were other lavatories but very much uninhabitable that I couldn't dare to visit. At the dawn of the morning, the incident had become major news on the parade ground as the newscasters presented. There were accusations that the camp officials had planned to kill the corps members but had failed.

Several other news was delivered on the parade ground. Like the inter platoon football and volleyball competitions, the chess and scrabble games.

That morning, we were meant to embark on a pre-endurance trek to keep us fit for the endurance trek proper that was only two days ahead.

We'd jogged out that morning clapping and singing in and around the towns of Ise, Orun and Emure. The three in one local government area. That was the first of its kind. In our large number, with the Man 'O' War and soldiers. According to our platoons we strolled around the villages.

At the time we'd left the camp ground and walking, seeing beautiful and even ugly sceneries was when I'd known that we'd been confined all along and like caged

birds, we'd desired freedom to put our feathers to test. The excitement and joy that filled us, knew no bounds. In our white upon white, we walked burning off calories and re-energizing our dead nerves and muscles. As we walked past houses and along the streets, the old and feeble, young and agile ones in their balconies and verandas bade us farewell. Some in their local dialects and some in the lingua Franca.



Pre-endurance trek

The pre-endurance trek was only about two hours or so. I'd not been able to measure the distance we covered in kilometers but it was long enough. We'd departed the campground at 7.00am and had arrived by some minutes to 10am. Almost three hours. We'd gone out through the main gate but on arriving, we'd come through the back entrance where the mammy market was situated.

I'd not known about that entrance until we came through it.

"So, that was the path that I'd heard the boys in my hostel talk about". How they sneaked their girlfriend out for pleasure during dusk and returning at dawn to meet up with the activities of the N.Y.S.C.

When we arrived at the camp, according to our platoons, we'd assembled respectively waiting for those platoon mates that were still at the back. My platoon commandants, Corporal Amos Babatunde had already picked and chose those that were fit for the march past. "Not all of you are fit for the parade. Only those of you that have the carriage that would represent this platoon", he'd told us several times. As we waited there on the parade ground, he called out those of us that he'd selected the day before and told us to wait behind when others were dismissed. We were about thirty in number. The about thirty of us were meant to disengage ourselves from other activities and remain strictly for the parade exercise so that nothing conflicted with the parade rehearsals.

I was in the OBS, Marilyn and Komomo also but he'd evicted us even though we were very good and fit. When we'd been dismissed from the parade ground that morning, I retired to my room to put my cerebrum into test. I had the task of making an advertisement for the Platinum Habib Bank as the Advert Manager. "Oh! I did not tell you that I was appointed to be in charge of commercials and Adverts. I forgot". The P.R.O had appointed me to take charge of the commercials and Ken to assist me. An idea that I'd sold to her and the 'OBS' crew that could fetch us money. We needed adverts to be aired in between the programs and announcements in the radio like a standard radio station. I'd already sought for advert placements from some of the banks that operated in

the Orientation Camp. It was only the bank PHB that had obliged. It was also the advert that I retired to the room to crack my brain for.

I had ended with two jingles that showcased the sophistications and innovative ability including a guaranteed security for money kept with the bank. How and why those who had no account with the bank needed to recognize themselves with a consolidated financial institution. One of the jingles, I did with Komomo and the other with Marilyn for only a meager sum of N2,000.00 for three slots in each program that was aired.

When I'd started running my countdown program, I'd made selections of the songs single handedly and had told the audience that if they were displeased with the selections, they could counter-act by bringing alongside to the studio their own selections or the songs they thought were good enough so I could play for them. Since all that was of utmost interest to me, was, how I played what was soothing to them – the listeners. It was only in my own shift that I aired the jingles. Even at night times when I anchored the program, 'Soul Serenade' with Marilyn, part of the time was left for commercials until it was lights out. That was a program that became a controversy in the camp as almost a many glued theirs ears listening to Marilyn and me debate on the Pros and Cons of relationships as it affected both male and female genders.

CHAPTER EIGHT

One of the evenings, Franka and I went to the Reg. Hall to watch a performance by the dance and drama troupe. The time for the performance wasn't due and so we sat at the backside of the hall adjacent the refectory watching their rehearsals. In the course, we videoed the troupe with the Nokia 6270 phone and made mockery as the dancers danced and the actors acted. It was some few minutes to 6pm at the time. The beagle had started to sound. It was the usual sound that was blown when either the nation's flag was going up the flag pole to depict a re-awakening of the nation or when the flag was going down to mean that the nation was resting. Since, it was in the evening, the sound from the beagle, depicted that the country was resting for the day and everyone who heard the sound was to standstill until the flag was dropped. I was the one with the videophone and also the one videoing even when the sound emitted from the beagle. I did not remember I was to standstill. Everyone about me, the troupe and even Franka had been still without me knowing. Franka was only still because, she sat on a desk watching the performers and as I presumed, she'd not remembered also

to ask me to keep still. As I walked about with the videophone still covering, unknown to me, the men in black upon black had kept me in their view.

At the instance the beagle faded into vacuum, two men, one on my left and the other on the right grabbed my arms and dragging me to follow them. What I did wasn't communicated to me and where they were taking me I'd not known either

"Ah...Ah, what have I done?" "Where are you taken me to?" I asked them. They ignored me and dragged me onwards like I'd killed someone and like they were going to tie me to a stake and shoot me to death.

I struggled with the men and persisted in knowing what I'd done and why they were taking me away and to where. They didn't say a word to me. The one who had my right hand echoed the statement.

"When you get there, you'll know! He told me.

When we'd gotten to where they took me to, they threw me into a room they called a Guard Room.

"Move in!" the policeman yelled at me.

"You'll remain here", he told me

"What have I done?" I asked them as I surveyed the room. It was a very dusty room without anything, adjacent the camp gate.

"What did I do?" I asked again astonished. The two policemen left me to a bench where another policeman and his female counterpart sat.

"Obey before complains", the lady cop told me. I was already inside the said Guard Room. What obedience was she talking about again?

"Let me know what I've done to deserve this molestation?" As I talked, Franka had come by to inquire on my behalf, as she too was stale.

"Don't answer him", one of the Policemen told the only Police lady.

"Let the camp commandant come first. He will soon know". They ignored me and chatted on.

"At least, let me know my offence", I said. I was becoming really infuriated and scarred to death that if I stayed there until the camp commandants showed up, I was done for. Franka had started to plead that my offence be told to me.

"No be you and him been stand there?"

The one who took me by the left hand asked at her.

"No be you?" he asked her again. She affirmed by nodding her head.

"Una no hear the beagle? Your boyfriend dey perambulate about when the beagle dey sound. Una no hear am eh? You, you no hear am?" The aggressive policeman scolded her. The four of them ignored and concentrated on themselves. Now that I knew my offence, I'd become penitent and so I pleaded with them a long time before they gave me audience.

"You been dey sharp ya mouth. You know no the rules? Eh?"

"I'm so sorry", I begged. I didn't mean to disobey. I didn't hear the beagle", I lied.

"I'll pardon you but because of dis fine girl here. You are a very lucky guy. You for hear whin today". The policeman told me.

"Get out from that place!"

I heeded and came out of the supposed cell that had no door. I thanked them and went away with Franka thinking what would have happened if I stayed there until the military men showed up. I'd never liked policemen, not for any reason. The Nigerian Police was a bunch of

ruthless beings, a bevy of illiterates and money conscious souls with a great sense of incompetence.

I'd had encounter with the high way police along the Edo/Benin axes on my way to school when I was in Year III along with my dad and my younger brother, I told Franka as we trod back to the Reg. Hall.

The camp was some sort of busy that evening. Everyone was getting set for the Marathon journey of the next day. The mammy market seemed crowded with an influx of new wares and traders and even customers. Items that might be needed for the endurance trek were displayed in this perfectly competitive environment.

When I went to the market, there were a lot of things that were of interest for the journey. Even though, one thought they were needless, the eager traders talked one into biting off more than could be chewed. They were selling those wares as a result of demand from past batch.

"You need this, Corper", the Yoruba trader told me, showing me the item.

It was a duffel bag. She had several colour of such bag in her hand.

"I don't think I need this", I told her.

"You need am... see ya mate don buy plenty", she was still talking when I walked past her wondering why she thought I needed it. I had a bum bag. Whatever I needed to carry for the journey, I could easily carry them in my bum bag, I thought. I went head on to survey the market before purchasing what was of interest to me. I bought a water bottle, glucose D, and some confectioneries. I'd heard the journey would be a lasting one, until the evening. I went to the lady with the duffel bags to purchase one, as all the items I'd bought could not be contained in my bum bag.

"Madam, nah how much for the bag wey you dey sell?" I inquired from her. She ignored me and minded some other female buyer.

"Make I see that one," I said.

"Nah Wetin, nah wetin be ya problem", she queried.

"Ah, ah.... Madam nah fight? I wan buy bag", I said to her.

"Ehn...Ehn, nah fight! I no sell am! Nah by force comot for here!" She shouted at me, shoving me away.

"Nah wah oo...", I was astonished.

"What is wrong with this woman?" I mumbled out words and walked away. She was still cursing when I left her. Was I supposed to buy her ware at the time she wanted? Didn't I have a right of purchase as a consumer? Or, she didn't know that a consumer is a king? How would she know when she was stricken with illiteracy?

I ignored her and walked towards my hostel. "But I really needed that bag", I thought. How would I carry those items I'd bought? And it seemed she was the only lady with those bags. I'd not seen any seller at the mammy with such bag.

"I'll get the bag any how", I thought. A colleague of mine could purchase the bag from her if I still wanted. That was what I'd do, I said to myself. But when I'd approached the hostel, there was another lady that hawked the same kind of bags around the hostels.

"Madam, nah how much you dey sell ya bags?" I asked the very dark complexioned woman with an ugly face with six large tribal marks, three each on either side of her cheeks that worsened the looks on her face, making her to resemble the Igbo masquerade that appears during the Arondizogwu Yam Festival.

When she stopped to give me attention, I noticed a set of decayed dentition in her mouth that must have been decayed by excessive alcohol and kolanut. As she talked to me, there was kolanut right in between her lower and upper jaw, at the left corner of her mouth.

"Nah which one?" She asked me with the lingua Franca that sounded like her dialect.

"Dem no be the same size?" I asked her, the bags looked exactly the same in size but had different colours and designs.

"No!, No be am ooo... nah small and big", she chewed the kolanut.

"O.k, how you dey sell the small one? Nah how much for the small bag and then the big one?"

"Nah N250, na im be the small bag Nah the last price be dat. The big one nah N400 but I fit leave am for N350", She said, showing me the bags in their sizes.

I picked one of the small bags and admired it.

"I go pay you N200.00" I told her.

"Ah! No be so I dey sell am. Nah two-two fifty I dey sell am. Nah wetin dat broda sef buy", she told me pointing at one male Corps member that she'd sold the same bag to.

I brought out three hundred and handed to her, waiting to receive N50.00 with the duffel bag with a puma design in my hand. She fumbled with her brassiere to bring out a wad of dirty notes tied with a string, and selected out a piece of very old fifty naira note to me.

I looked at the note and looked at the woman who busied herself with the untied string and the monies, retrying the string so she could put the money back into her brassiere where she'd brought it from. I looked at her a second time after I'd put the old naira note into my wallet and pitied her ignorance, as she was very much prone to

cancer of the breast and skin diseases. Who knows whether she was already suffering from some. I took the bag and went away into the hostel. I was going to get my stuffs set for the trek just like my counterparts had done. That same evening, I had the 'shout out' programme to be aired. So, I tidied up quickly and ran into the 'OBS'.

Some guys had paid me tokens to play them their desired tunes for their girlfriends and some to their boyfriends. Some even scribbled down words they wanted me to air to the hearings of those they were love lorned for. Something like a match make or the game played by a secret admirer with a forlorn hope in a bid to reassure themselves that their soul mates may consent.

I'd aired one of such for a dude who thought his dream girl was right there at the camp but he'd not been able to take the bull by the horn to confront her and spill out his undying love to her. He'd even trusted that the words she'd hear from the radio would confer greater impact than when he confronted her himself. But on the contrary, I'd thought him to be very pusillanimous as par, even though the girl consented to his radio advances before seeing him in person, when she finally got seeing him, she may be displeased as a result of his looks. I granted his request anyway. I had to, since that was my selfless obligation and I'd been paid to. Several others had one or more words to wish their loved ones', a successful endurance trek, those that knew what it was like. Not like they'd had the experience before but they knew what it took. Perhaps, past discourses with experienced friends and relations. That night, it was talks here and there about the endurance trek. One of the biggest or most interesting exercises in the N.Y.S.C. Scheme. It was only when the day had broke the next day that the feel of the trek itself

dawned on me. I didn't have anxiety until the journey commenced.

When the day broke the next morning, about 4.30am or 5am on the dot, we assembled again as usual. Nothing was done without the morning calls except on Sundays. We'd gathered according to our platoons and we were told, the journey was to commence by 6.30am that morning. Those in which it was their turn to takeover the kitchen were to make us breakfast before our departure. And then, we were to sustain ourselves for the rest of the day.

In my platoon, we'd contributed meager sum to get stuffs we needed for the journey. Some bags of packaged water, some cartons of Nasco biscuits, some packs of sweet and chewing gum and glucose D. This was my platoon's idea. I didn't know if it was applicable to the other platoons.

Before we took off that morning, very stern instructions were passed across to us.

"On no occasion should any of you stray away from your platoon mates. The moment you stray, you are as vulnerable as a fly trapped in the spider's web. Like endangered specie in the den of a predator, you could easily be preyed upon. For your information, we would be passing through hills and valleys, thick forest and even wading through waters, for those of you weaklings, especially the female Corps members, you are advised to seek for assistance from your counterparts. Those boyfriends that have girlfriends, this is when you're to showcase your masculinity". The crowd jeered and murmured. I thought about my girlfriend. She was in a different platoon from mine. Except we were allowed to mingle, how do I show her that I was a superman? Even supermen, sometimes were wearied of circumstances. At

the time I became wearied, wouldn't I advise, she carried her cross by herself like Jesus did all the way to 'Golgota'.

"We would walk through farmlands of poor farmers in the state. Like I told you earlier, Ekiti State is an agrarian State. Greater percentage of the Ekitis are farmers. On no occasion should you tamper with the crops of these farmers in their farmlands. On no occasion should you damage their crops or even eat from them. Some of the crops have 'Juju' on them", the State Coordinator told us. "We are all going to leave this camp ground together and return back to this place," She pointed at the ground, "together", she said. And, like something ran through her memory.

"This serves as warning to those of you weak bones that would subject to stopping bikes on the road and even taxis, to take you to a place you know nothing about, you could be kidnapped and or raped.

We have had cases of missing Corps members and raped females outside camping activities, we do not want anymore of such experiences to re-occur again. Have I made myself clear?" She held the lobe of her left ear to make sure what she'd communicated was well heard.

Whether she talked from then till the day ended, those that would listen would listen and those that wouldn't, wouldn't.

Several information and instructions were passed acrossed to us until the morning was becoming bright.

"We do not have time to waste. You would go back to your hostels and kit up to the fullest. The N.Y.S.C. cap, the crested vest, the Khaki trousers and jacket, the N.Y.S.C stockings and jungle boots. Lest I forget. No wearing of expensive creams, No perfumes, no make up... None of all these should be worn. If you do, you would be

attracting bees to yourselves. There are a lot of bees and insects in the bushes. If they are attracted to you, you know what that means. A word is enough for the wise. You are all matured to be able to take to instructions. This is the essence of this program so that you are well groomed before you go to the labour market. After you must have kitted up, you, proceed to the refectory for your breakfast after which you assemble here again for the journey to commence. You have only but 20mins to assemble back to this place". She admonished us. She handed the microphone to the Camp commandant who dismissed us. We proceeded to the refectory for breakfast. It was the usual brown water, devoid of beverages and a loaf of yeasty bread that we were served that morning and a paste of butter on the loaf.

When we were ready to depart, the State Coordinator, the P.R.O., the Camp Director, all the sports officials, the Man 'O' War commander, had all kitted in their tracksuits. The camp commandant and his battalion were all dressed up in their camouflages.

The whole camp officials, in front of us, they gathered with the State Coordinator at the forefront holding the N.Y.S.C. flags.

The trek started at 6.45am that morning. We started away in platoons with each platoon commandant and a Man 'O' War to their respective platoons. We clapped and sang along. In our thousands, we filed on the half of the dual lane. We'd trod upon that path before during the Pre-Endurance trek. It was the same lane we took and so there was nothing really fascinating as we walked.

It was only when we'd gotten to the King's palace, the 'Elemure of Emure,' that the journey took a new shape. When we got to the palace, there was the sound of the talking drum from about four or maybe five drummers

who hung the drums across their shoulders playing the welcome tune or perhaps an alert tone to notify the monarch on our arrival. Like there had been a pre-information of our visit to the palace they'd tidied the environment. Or maybe that was the usual sight of the palace since that was the first time we were visiting it. A place that looked like a shrine tied with raffia palm was where the Elemure sprang out from when the N.Y.S.C. officials required his attention. He'd come out with his kinsmen in the 'agbada' attire with a cap they called 'fila'. When the monarch came forth, we kowtowed to pay homage. It was such a large crowd. Only one-third of the crowd succeeded in entering the palace. The remaining shrubbed the main road like grasses.

It was the State Coordinator, the P.R.O, Camp Director and other officials that went in our stead.

Whatever was the discourse, whatever was the reason we visited the Oba's palace wasn't communicated to us.

Our only business when we got there was the appraisal we gave and appreciation for whatever gifts we were given or whatever prayers that was offered to us. We stayed in the palace for about thirty minutes. Even at the time, the Guerilla had started misbehaving, chewing his cod like a ruminant and regurgitating the already masticated grasses and using it to rub on his face, we concentrated instead of paying attention on the monarch. The Guerilla had turned out the centre of attraction at the palace in his camouflage jacket, the helmet and very huge backpack as he galloped alongside his followers with accorded accolades. It was there in the palace that we mingled. No longer in platoons. When we left the palace, we'd lost focus of reshuffling ourselves back into platoons.

The journey as we were told still had some many kilometers to be covered. The exodus had just begun; the most adventurous and dreadful part awaited us.

When we'd left the town, we journeyed through the mountainous region, climbing on the ridges of the mountain or hills. Then, I'd lost contact with Marilyn and my girlfriend – Franka was nowhere to be found. The one who kept me company was Onome. We'd met at the palace. The chanting and chorusing were still on and much exuberance and jeering. As we climbed tirelessly, giving lending hand to those weaklings, on the cliff of the mountains or hills, we could see the overview of the town of Ise, Orun and Emure. It was an ancient town. The rooftops showed it. The rusty roofing sheets and dilapidated structure showed the town could be as old as Metusela, the oldest man in the Bible days. The mountain climbing task was a very chaotic one. When I climbed on the rocky promontory that overlooked the valley with thick forest, fear gripped me. My heart started to thump like five times a second. But everyone that climbed that part to the other side was safe, even those confectioners the cameraman and those that sold water. It was then that I saw a very big black scorpion in one of the crevices of the rocky mountain or hill. The scorpion had its two gigantic claws spread open like those of a crab approaching me when I held on tightly to a steep rock until I climbed to the other side. Suppose the scorpion got to me and stung me, it would have been the second time in my life that I'd had to be a victim. The first and only time so far that I had the stings of the scorpion was at my family home garden. Sometimes when I was harvesting potatoes and groundnuts, I was to uproot a tuber from underneath the soil. I'd felt a very sharp pain in the forefinger of my left arm like a needle had pierced through it.

When my sensory neurons sent the discomfort to my brain and when the venom had started to work in my body, I'd passed out. When I regained consciousness was after series of injections. It was by God's grace that I survived the trauma, but not until after six or seven hours.

The black scorpion I saw was about the biggest that I'd seen apart from the giant scorpions that I see in the movies, probably enlarge by camera lenses. I wished I were in the Guerilla's troop at the time I saw that scorpion. I wanted to beat my curiosity. I'd heard that the Guerilla had no allergy for the fangs and venom of snakes and scorpion strings. I even saw some pictures of the Guerilla with a big black python wrapped around his shoulders and another picture of a black scorpion on his head. Whatever he did to those creatures must be through diabolism.

When we succeeded in climbing to the other side, we were to pass through a very thick bush but we'd have to wade through a little stream. It was something like a turn by turn. At the time some of us who were by the stream were getting ready to wade, a soldier who called himself 2,4 as in (Tufor), the commandant of platoon 9 rushed passed with his boys chanting and splashing the water onto some of us that were close by. It was a crowd of very energetic boys and girls – a moving train. Another way to catch fun. They were not trekking as was supposed. They and the leader crashed into the bushes, like would a rhinoceros chasing after its prey. The soldier was one of the most agile in the battalion. A cute chap with broad chest like a macho man. I followed the bandwagon, the attempt was to be at the fore-front with those that had the N.Y.S.C. flag.

When the journey first started, it was the State Coordinator who bore the flag but then at the Elemure of Emure's palace where we first converged, the flag was

given to one dude by name Austin, a member of platoon 1 and a room mate of mine that I shared the same bunk with. He was actually the platoon leader of his platoon and then the flag bearer from the time he was handed the flag until the journey clapsed. He was the guy at the forefront alongside important personalities of the orientation Program. The camp commandant, the Man 'O' War, and some sporting officials, the State Coordinator, Camp Director, the P.R.O have, since resorted to an automobile that zoomed them around town.

No matter how we hurried to get to the front, we couldn't overtake the flag bearer. We were not even allowed to. Only the Cameramen were liable to be at the front. We continued with our non-stop jogging, clapping, running, especially those of us that followed 2,4 and chanting. Some lazy bones were already exhausted for about 3hrs or so that we'd trekked, the overweight and even the vulnerable ones. I'd considered the journey a hell of a distance, miles and miles away to be covered and so I thought I was catching groove seeing the nooks and cranny of part of the state. There were those who had good companions, gisting their way through the journey and giving lending hands to their counterparts as we were told by the state coordinator.

The next time we stopped was at a hamlet called 'Fulani Village'. This hamlet had only about five huts very much closely built. A place in the state where the nomadic tribe lived. At one end of the hamlet, eastward were a group of young herdsmen with their herd grazing at the valley. The Fulani ladies had fresh palm wine that they sold in gourds at very cheap amount. About thirty or forty (N30 or N40) naira for a full gourd of palmwine. Where they tapped it from left me wondering. Because looking

around, there were no palmtrees except far away into the valleys.

Some of the Corpers had resorted to taken one or two gourds of palm wine. I did not, because it was the same gourd that was used by one or more persons that would be used by another. There were the sale of several fruits and root crops, also tubers. One very usual thing that was typical of the Fulanis was the local yoghurt that was tapped from the udder of a matured cow commonly called '*Fura de nunu*', usually sold in, calabashes and drunk with a ladle. Some Corps, members especially those from the north had settled in one of the huts to sip the drink. Some of us who did not drink palmwine or fura settled for snapshots posing by the huts until we proceeded. We'd stayed there for about twenty minutes before proceeding. We stayed in wait for those that were far behind to cover up the gap before we started away. The distance as we were meant to believe was still several miles away. We were not even half the way. The exodus must continue until we got to the promise land like in the days of Moses and the Israelites in the wilderness of sin.

We continued to walk. Now we'd come out of the bushes and approaching the towns in Emure. It was a very big community with a great number of dilapidated structures that must have been built in the colonial era. The next time we got into the bushes, it was in a very large cocoa plantation with several ripe cocoa pods that looked very much inviting. We'd already been reprimanded and we must abide. There were also oranges and other plantations as we walked by. The trek along the plantations reminded me of the days when there were no automobiles, when it was only the 'Iron horse' that was ridden from one very long distance to another, usually owned by the affluent but the commoners walked miles to

get to their destinations. We represented the commoners troding on the aisle of the plantations.

Five hours had gone by. We'd trekked several immeasurable Kilometres. The next stop was in another village. A village of the 'Igbirras', the people from Kogi State. The most fascinating thing when we stopped by was the local factory where 'gari' was processed. A large open house made with four wooden sticks in a rectangular form and roofed with zinc where the kiln is placed and a large frying pan mounted on clay just around the Kiln. It was in this frying pan that the processed cassava (after the fluid in it was squeezed out and dried), was fried until it came out to be 'gari' the usual staple food in almost all parts of the country. This little house was usually very hot because of the heat that emanated from the kiln.

When we arrived at the village chorusing and making a hell of noise, some of us decided to help the poor ladies who were in the process of converting raw cassava into the popular staple food. The process as I know, was usually to harvest very matured cassava tubers, removing the peels, soaking the cassava in water for a couple of days until it became soft and sour and then taken to the miller to be grinded into paste. Usually, the milled paste is tied into a sack where the water is scooped out until the paste was without fluid. The paste was dried in the sun for a period before it is taken to the kiln where it is fried and converted into the usual staple food – 'Garri'.

Some of us knew the process. Some were just seeing the process but weren't interested in knowing it completely. And some who knew the process even some who didn't know where interested and decided to give lending hands to the Igbirra ladies. We barely stayed at that spot. The camp commandant thought those who were far behind that we stayed in wait for, where weaklings.

"No matter how long we waited, there would still be those who can't meet up the pace. Let's go!" He said. And we started away. The journey was becoming really interesting. Several eye-catching scenery we'd passed and like more and more were still ahead of us.

All through the five or six hours that we'd walked, my girlfriend was never in sight. "Do you think it was because of our platoon difference?"

Several others who'd girlfriends had paired up, platoon difference regardless. We were no longer according to our platoons. We'd mingled and tangling as Corps members from the same Orientation Camp. That was some hours ago at the palace of the Elemure of Emure.

I didn't tell you why my girlfriend and I weren't together, although, I'd very much love to. I'd envied those lovebirds with their soul mates walking hand in hand assisting one another to scale through. Where ever she was at the time whether back or forth, I was certain she was catching her groove. But I was very much convinced she wasn't in front because I'd in many times approached the front but only retreated when I was becoming exhausted. She probably would be in the middle of the crowd or far behind. I thought about her several times in the course of the journey and for the six hours or so that we'd covered, there was no trace of her.

The previous day, we'd had a little quarrel that put us away. She'd caught me with Marilyn walking hand in hand one of the evenings to the mammy market for dinner and she'd become displeased with me. It wasn't only that she confirmed and saw us together that fateful evening but words had gotten to her on several occasions of my escapade with Marilyn. All efforts to disprove that there was no stings attached fell on deaf grounds.

"Stay away from me!" she'd told me that night. "Never come looking for me. I'm very serious about it else, I'll embarrass you". She told me very sternly that night when I returned from the mammy market and then to visit her. I disliked embarrassment with a passion and not when it was from a girl. And so, in order to save my face and not to go by the board, I'd kept to myself only paroling with my homeboys. Marilyn had in several occasions hit me on my cell phone to inquire on my where about. "I am very far away. Far, far in front". I'd told her not knowing where exactly she was when she called. She was going to be a thorn in my flesh if I had her around me. I didn't want to be bothered and so I concentrated on me, myself and I.

The day was becoming so hot and scorching. The sun shone very brightly up in the skies spiting out blazing heat. The sight of it was so twitching to the eyes that we were beginning to need sunshades and umbrellas, and we'd started to perspire profusely. I for one had sweat wetting my N.Y.S.C vest. With the presence of the sun, the journey was becoming meaningless, stressful and very much tiring. We were still on the move when some of us noticed that some lazybones displayed their cowardice by mounting on motorbikes. In spite of the warnings and instructions we were given before embarking on the Marathon trek, some still resorted to taking bikes and taxis. 'Judas Iscariot.' When we perched in another spot to wait for those at the back to cover up, my girlfriend had come by me. She was bare footed and looking all wearied out.

"I hate trekking", she lamented to me, and collapsing on my weary body.

"You didn't give a hoot about me", she said. "I hate you. I hate you", her voice was croaking when she

said that to me. I was sorry I cared less but she induced it. We took solace in front of an old Anglican church house waiting for others to meet up. When we started moving again, this time my girlfriend and I were holding hands seeming inseparable like the 'Siamese twins'.

"I'd never let you go again, I promise". I told her, wrapping my arm across her shoulder. She still had her jungle boots in her hands but she'd worn the pair of stockings. 'Have you been walking bare footed on this sun-baked grounds?' I inquired.

"What do you care?" was her response in a rather unfriendly manner.

"My jungle boots are undersize. My toes have been stubbed by the boots".

"I'm sorry", I said "Give em' to me, let me ease your stress". She handed the unlaced boots to me and we walked on gibberishing words to ourselves. It wasn't long that in front of us we noticed a crowd of corps members and street urchins trying to revive someone. When we got closer, it was an exhausted female corper that had collapsed and fainted. A male corper was trying to resuscitate her and he was pressing her on the chest to help her heart beat. Those who were ignorant of the mouth-to-mouth resuscitation thought the dude was using the opportunity to kiss her. She'd already been soaked with water. Where water came from on the lonely aisle was like an unsolved puzzle. My girlfriend and I after viewing the scenery, continued with our trek, as the crowd was large enough to be able to put her back to her feet. Whether she came out of the dilemma or not, I did not know. We



Morris and Franka

Walked on approaching the market square. It was a very busy and untidy environment peculiar to other market environments in the other states in the federation. That was the closest market to the camp and the place where most of the corps members during the inter-platoon cooking competitions had gone to get foodstuffs.

It wasn't a distance away from the market square as we walked that we took solace in another spot believed to be a palace. The soldiers and corps members, who'd arrived earlier at the palace of the 'Ijurin of Ekiti', had begun to dance around, clapping and singing. It was a very large open ground with a very massive tree that looked like a deity in the centre of the arena. Some plastic chairs have been arranged at strategic corners awaiting our return as words had already gotten to the Ojurin on our arrival. It was at that palace that we were re-uniting again with the State Coordinator, the P.R.O., camp director and other important personnel. It was obvious they'd not been part of the endurance trek. They seemed to be very mobile with automobiles. They were already at the palace when we arrived. Another homage to a monarch. He was seen as a mediator between the people and the gods and also the

paramount ruler of Ijero Kingdom in Ekiti. When we arrived there about the eighth hour and several miles of the distance covered, the Ojurin appeared from a place that looked like a shrine coming out with the rear with two kinsmen on either side of his left and right arms. When they turned to face us, we were told to kowtow, bowing completely to the ground in homage to the monarch. One of the kinsmen or council of Chiefs handed a gin to the monarch in which he started to pour libation and enchantments to the gods of the land for our safe arrival to his palace and to the state and the god's guidance back to our destination. His blessings did not stop there. He blessed our various families in the native dialect and offered us gifts in cash and in kind. When we got off the ground, it was drumbeat from the local talking drum that conveyed words to us that the monarch had to retire back to his palace. After wards, it was sonorous appraisals to the Ojurin and his council of Chiefs. The Ijurin's palace was the last place we visited before we started away to the campground. The journey back to the campground was stressless only we were using the last iota of strength as exhaustion had taken all over us. The route back to the camp was different from how we'd come. No more hills and valleys, mountains, bushes and waters. It was the tarred part of the town we'd walked by until we got by at the Orientation Camp.

"Eureka". We gave a sigh of relief when the gate of the camp could be seen and when we approached it. It was about two hours of quality walk from the palace of the Ojurin to the Orientation Camp and about ten hours for the duration of the trek. It was about 3.30pm that we arrived at the camp. At least that was what my chronometer said when my girlfriend and I got into the gate. It was a once in

a lifetime journey. More painstaking than the exodus of the Israelites, from Egypt to the promise land.

CHAPTER NONE

The much awaited endurance trek had come and gone. It was an aftermath discourse that filled the air in the camp. Everybody's lips had their own experiences to relay to their peers. It was like a celebration over the success of a tedious exercise. Almost a many had never had a marathon trek of that nature. A trek of several distances in kilometers and miles away and several precious time that was lavished. The aftermath of the exercise was several body aches. Waist pain to back aches, even the thigh muscles and arms suffered severe pains. To those of us that never committed our bodies to physical fitness, it was like hell going to bed and waking the next morning. When the beagle had sounded the next morning summoning us to the parade ground, there was a great deal of regrets that was kindled on our faces. "Why wasn't the trek on a Saturday so that, we rested with the whole of Sunday since there were no clarion calls and no compulsory exercises?" Except for stalwarts who have mandated themselves to always be at their places of worship. "Why did it have to be on a Friday?" How unreasonable people can be. The officials themselves that required our presence, don't they have bones, tendons,

ligaments and muscles in their bodies? Or would they claim their bodies were used to the exercise? Perhaps, they were robots. What did they want to tell us that couldn't wait until the break of dawn? At least by 6 or 7.00am. Or was there a reward for the first set of returnees from the endurance trek? Like, Gold, silver or bronze medallions?

'Twas only the endurance trek that wasn't competitive. No inter-platoon competition unlike the other activities. When we assembled, it was congratulatory messages from the P.R.O., Camp Director and Camp Commandant on our success over the marathon trek. The next very important event was to be the Miss NYSC beauty pageant alongside Mr. Macho for the hefty dudes on the campground, to balance the equation. Like the Miss Coca-Cola beauty pageant, interested girls must register their names with the P.R.O. but unlike the former, interested guys must be enlisted. There have always been announcements for the pageant since the past days. The girls for the Miss NYSC pageant must be newly recruited. They mustn't be partakers of the past Miss Coca-Cola. New girls must be screened and enlisted. There was this lass on the Orientation ground that everybody kept an eye on. She was about the tallest of all the girls and even to some of the guys on the campground. She was confidently 6 feet and weighing about a hundred and fifty pounds. She was a beautiful one, dark and lovely with a scintillating grin wide enough almost touching the lobes of her ears. Almost a many had expected to see her at the past Miss Coca-Cola beauty pageant but she'd not appeared. It was apparent she was keeping herself for the ground competition. Suppose she'd appeared for the Miss Coca-Cola pageant, the chance of being a partaker of the Miss N.Y.S.C. would have seemed abortive. I was at the 'OBS' when she came for enlisting. It was very much apparent

she was motivated by her friends as they must have convinced her of her personal traits and attributes and the opportunities she had being the Miss N.Y.S.C. of the 2006 batch B Corps members.

Several other girls frequented the 'OBS' to enlist themselves and even the guys. There wasn't much to talk about on the parade ground that morning. The usual camp routine was still on. Those who were to oversee the affairs of the kitchen were still to keep on with the order of the program. When we were dismissed, my platoon and few others stayed behind. My Platoon commandant, Corporal Babatunde required our attention. What he had to say was nothing more than parade for the P.O.P. as we guessed. That was what he was good at discussing every time he required our presence. We started to grumble especially a few antsy female corps members who thought they needed to relieve themselves off the rigours of the past endurance trek. Their grumbling became too incessant that the Platoon commandant thought he could take it no more and he took offence.

"Kneel down! Kneel down everyone of you!" He shouted at us attempting to hit anyone that was still standing with his truncheon. We struggled to squat and kneel at once. He left us for a few seconds walking aggressively to the R.S.M. to take permission to deal with us. When he was back, he'd come with another soldier, a very stout and aggressively looking man with huge tribal marks on both sides of his cheeks like one he'd gotten through an encounter with a wild cat. He was dark complexioned about the darkest in the battalion. He looked like a non-Nigerian, probably a Ghanaian or perhaps from the hottest region of the country, that is, if he was a national.

"All of you, lie down!" The soldier exclaimed. He was the platoon commandant of platoon four. He'd come with a whip in his hands.

"What! Was he going to thrash the hell out of us?" We were about a hundred and twelve.

"What was it that we did wrong that warranted us been thrashed?" My heart started to thump.

"What kind of public disgrace is this?" Some fellow around me had started to murmur.

"I will teach you a lifetime lesson you'll never forget". My commandant told us. "I've been too lenient with all of you. Thrash them!" He told the other soldier. We'd already laid down on the very cold-ground, an effect of the night's drizzles and early morning dew. The dark soldier seized the first fellow a very plump dude.

"Move over here" he commanded him. He separated the first guy from the rest of us. "Lie flat!" He told him. The dude complied. He raised his arm up putting the whip high in the sky and dropping it hard on the dudes back

"Ah.....!" shouted the guy. That was when we knew that the situation was really out of hand. But come to think of it, if he was going to thrash the whole of us I couldn't believe it. We'd started to become penitent especially the female folks and so we started pleading for forgiveness.

"Shut up! Shut up!" Shouted my platoon commandant kicking those that were close by him. The stout looking soldier kept on lashing the fall guy. He had already talking three hot lashes on his back before our rescue ranger came to save us.

"What did they do wrong?" asked the R.S.M. "Let them up!"

We didn't wait for the corporal to ask us up and some of us jumped up from the cold ground looking all soiled up with mud.

"Thank you Sir!" We chorused unanimously. But the fall guy, he'd taken our pain like a martyr but this time not dying for a just cause.

"Line up in twos". The R.S.M. told us. "Double up!" We shuffled ourselves and lined up in twos facing the soldier men.

"What do you have to say to your commandant?" asked the R.S.M. I didn't know what he required us to say, likewise some others. But to some who knew,

"Thank you Sir!" they said. "We are sorry Sir" others said.

"Respect your platoon commandant", the R.S.M. said curtly and walked away.

"I am a soldier. I am trained to kill I am not trained to even maim. I am a trained soldier, a fighter of war. Do not tempt me. Have I made myself clear?"

He perambulated about us.

"Yes Sir!" We said in unison. Some of us mimicked him in low tones. I overheard one lad say,

"So, you been wan kill us!" "He was one of those troublesome people that could cause a 'storm in a teacup'. Thank God the commandant didn't hear his statement.

"I will not tolerate disobedience from anyone of you from today hence forth. Those of you that have been selected for the match past would wait behind for rehearsals. And those of you that are to play the football match including the female volley ballers must wait behind. The rest of you, move towards the goal post but if you have any special function for the day, you are excused but first with reasonable permission" he said to us.

I singled myself out from the crowd. I wasn't a partaker of the march past neither was I to play the football match nor the volleyball.

"Sir!" I excused him. "I'm an 'OBS' member," I brought out my 'OBS' tag to show him. I'll be working at the 'OBS' soon". I told him. 'I know you and some two others. You may go.

"Thank you Sir!" I said, turning to leave. Marilyn and Komomo did likewise and followed me.

"It is good being in the 'OBS'. Marilyn said as she ran up to meet me.

"We have a lot of saving grace with the 'OBS'. Komomo said.

"That's true, said I.

"I'll get to my hostel first before coming to the 'OBS'. I haven't yet bathed".

"Commandant was really angry today. He'd have thrashed you guys. Marilyn said.

"Including you". Komomo teased as they both laughed.

"He wouldn't have. Not to me. I would have acted sick like Betty that's always using that to dodge work". They were still talking when I left them.

When I returned to the 'OBS' at about noon, the P.R.O. was preparing to celebrate her birthday.

"I'm sorry I didn't pre-inform you all," she told us after she'd summoned every member of the 'OBS' to converge at the studio. We were about eighteen in number. "I want all of you to seat comfortably. Those of you that are just coming take a seat and be comfortable. Let me first welcome all of you formally to this gathering. You all are welcome". The P.R.O. said. "Today is my birthday. I was suppose to tell you but I didn't remember until about 9.00am this morning". We jeered and laughed.

"Happy birthday!" Some of us said.

"Not now!" said Mr. Toyin. "We'd do it better in the cause of this celebration".

"I am very pleased to have all of you celebrate my birthday with me. I am sorry, it was very impromptu and so, you'll make do with the little I have to offer. Mr. Toyin", She called at her assistant.

"Please", Bring out those things and share amongst them".

We were all there seated and having side talks also gazing at the P.R.O. and Mr. Fadahunsi who both sat in the middle. Mr. Fadahunsi stood up from his chair to get whatever the P.R.O. had to offer us. It was a crate of soft drinks and some biscuits.

"Please, make do with my offer", she said when Mr. Tosin brought them forward. She called on Betty to bless her offer.

"Take it to the throne of grace". She said. Betty was the oldest female in the 'OBS'. She was a tall light skinned damsel with pointed nose like those of the Caucasian, from the Northern region of the country. Kaduna, to be more precise.

When she'd blessed it, the celebration began. We started to clink our bottles in cheers with a party jamz, blasting off the speakers. I was the one on the stereos and on the microphone, alerting those who couldn't be part of the fun filled atmosphere in the studio that something spectacular was taken place.

"It was Mummy's birthday", as she was fondly called, the P.R.O. of the N.Y.S.C. Orientation Programme. It was only we, the selected few that could be a part and parcel of the celebration. "I couldn't have treated you better than how it is now. You all are my loving children", said the P.R.O.

"I am happy to have all of you working with me. This is the most intelligent and most dedicated set that I have worked with, I mean your set is the best", the P.R.O. commended. We clapped and thanked her for the commendations.

She started to mention our names individually to tell us how effective and how important we'd been to the service of N.Y.S.C. and to humanity in general and how she was urging us to put more efforts in whatever we did even when there were no monetary attachments and how God rewards diligence of selfless service. When she'd finished talking, we sang her the birthday song and appreciated her benevolence and motherly attitude. She was indeed very motherly. She was a mother far away from home. Everyone of us testified to that. Even those that weren't as close as we in the 'OBS' were testified.

It was just some few minutes past 3.00pm when Mrs. Olusoji's birthday ended. She'd had to attend to those contestants for the Miss. NYSC beauty pageant whilst, Mr. Ogunsanya and the P.R.O.'s assistant attended to the contestants for the Mr. Macho competition. The contestants were already at the 'OBS' waiting. Two o'clock was the time she told them to come for screening. It was past 3.00pm at the time. "We've been waiting since", they complained when the P.R.O. emerged from the studio. Whatever was the screening procedures was a concern to the contestants themselves and however it was, was their own business. When the evening came, some few minutes to the kick-off time, some of us were obligated to fix the hall in which the contest was to take place. I was one of those in the duty of fixing up the Reg. Hall. Marilyn had always taken it upon herself as the mistress of interior décor and her horticultural ability as par her discipline as a botanist. We'd started to arrange the

hall and cleaning up. All the equipments that were needed for sound, we evacuated from the 'OBS'. The contestants had already been kept in isolation undergoing screening exercises. The ones that past were scrutinized for the event proper. I wasn't part of the organizing committee and so I retired back to my room after we'd tidied the hall for the event.

After about half an hour when I went back to the venue, the hall had been jam-packed. It was dusk already. The dark part of the night just resumed some minutes ago. When I got into the hall, I barely had a comfortable place to occupy in order to catch every glimpse of the event for the night. It was at the bandstand that I took solace very close to where the Disc Jockey operated. The hall was so full that there was hardly a space to be occupied. Desperate Corps members who lost the opportunity of sitting comfortably, started to perch and linger around the windows, exit and entry points. Franka, was one of such. She bade me from outside when she saw me close to the staged platform. The show had started off. The masters of Ceremony had the microphone. The judges were already seated. Invited guest of honour also. It was the bevy of pretty damsels and masculine dudes that kept us in wait.

The first appearance when the girls filed up the stage was in their casual outfits, which were their N.Y.S.C kits comprising, the crested vest, the khaki trousers, jungle boots and stockings and the face cap. It was only the Khaki jacket they did without. They were twelve in number. The lucky few that scaled through the screening exercise out of twenty-one of the enlisted girls. After the assessment, the girls wiggled off the stage. I could see the eyes of the judges watching keenly on them. Whilst the pageant girls made to change into something else for their next appearances, the macho men filed up the stage. Their

first appearance was in their underpants. They were about ten in number, strolling confidently up the stage to display their macho bodies that had been lubricated with oil to show case the contours. Biceps and triceps muscles were displayed making the female Corpsers yelling in excitement. This was a new phenomenon in the camp and so, the jubilation was great almost pulling off the roof of the Reg. Hall. I never knew there were hefty dudes as were filed up on the platform in the camp until that night. Even if they'd been working out the days before, I'd not noticed.

There was this guy with a hairy chest that barely had the built of a macho. He was contestant number 8, a very handsome looking guy. He had become the hearthrob of the ladies that night. Even my girlfriend had a huge crush for him that night that she'd longed he won the contest. Barely a minute or two of their display, like Hulk Hogan in the WWF, they left the stage. Their second appearance was in their traditional attire. There were four or five appearances for the contestants before those who were qualified for the crowns were chosen. For the category of the Miss NYSC pageant, the head in which the crown fit was Miss Naomi, a graduate of Accountancy from the University of Benin. The one in whom almost all Corps member had fate in.

She was crowned the Miss NYSC of the 2006 Batch 'B' for Ekiti State. A member of Platoon 16. Then for the Mr. Macho competition, the winner was an ugly looking fellow, very poised and intrepidous. He had the built of a superman and spoke queens English. He was the least expected by the crowd to emerge the Mr. Macho. But the judges' judgements were final. They were expected to be shrewd in their judgements and so it was. Whether we

liked it or not, our emergent Mr. Macho was that fellow from Platoon 9, not the heartthrob of the ladies.

CHAPTER TEN

The NYSC camping activities were gradually coming to an end. Only two days or forty-eight hours more left. Nineteen quality days had gone by. Whether effectively utilized or not, it was a once in a lifetime experience. Migrating from one geo-political zone to another in which ordinarily it wouldn't run across one's memory was a great opportunity. A blessing in disguise getting to know the diversity, norms, values and ethics as well as cultural background of a part of the federation of the most populous black nation. There were no regrets on my part knowing I was deployed to the south west and to Ekiti State for that matter, it was God's will, let His will be done. The experience of the camp, discipline and perseverance, obedience and hardwork had been the lessons so far. The countdown to the closure of the camp was on everyone's lips.

I for one, the camping life was a mixed grill of pain and pleasure. Sleepless nights and meager, undone and unsatisfying meals plus restlessness and discomfort. But in all, there were great lessons learnt. It was the 25th of September 2006. The last very important camping activity

was scheduled for that day. Everything was to be wound up before the morrow, which was to be unavoidably important. The volleyball and football finals were scheduled for 1.00pm. The matches were between platoon's 3 and 9 for the volley ballers and platoons 8 and 9 for the football. I was at the 'OBS' when the matches kicked off. I was running a program on the radio when words got to me from the P.R.O. to fix up an advert placement in honour of the sponsor of the final matches for both the volleyball and football. Perhaps, they'd been the official sponsors of the games from the onset without me knowing. When I ran out of the studio to inquire what I had to do exactly, the P.R.O. had told me,

"You've got fifteen minutes to cook up an appraisal for the official sponsor of this event. You'd run your advert during the 15 minutes interval to the commencement of the 2nd half". She told me.

"Who are the sponsors?" I asked her.

"How come you didn't know Spring Bank as the official sponsors of the inter-platoon games? These are relevant information you should know as a correspondent reporting for 'OBS'. Now, you have to run". The match was barely mid-way to the first half. There was a large crowd of supporters cheering. It seemed to be an interesting match especially that the Guerilla's platoon was involved. The state coordinator and the chairman of the NYSC governing board as well as other dignitaries were already seated under the canopies catching glimpses of the match. Trophies and cash prizes awaited the winners of the matches. I ran back into the studio to brainstorm on how the advert would be, just like I did for the Platinum Habib Bank. But I couldn't do it alone so I required the assistance of Komomo as we'd done the other times. It was very brief but impact making as far as we

were concerned and the bank also. When we went to deliver the advertisement, the aim was to stir up the minds of prospective customers the numerous benefits they stand to enjoy venturing with a consolidated conglomerate as Spring Bank and as a financial institution. Especially for its numerous assistance it gives to her customers like the one enjoyed by the NYSC scheme at the time. The match had been a very splendid one as could be seen in the mood of everyone. It had ended in penalty shoot out as both teams were very much indomitable. At the end of the day, platoon 8 became champion over the rest of the platoons beating their runner-up six goals to five and claiming the trophy and gold medallions. The enthusiasm demonstrated by the championed platoon was overwhelming. It was a joy that knew no bounds especially that it was the renowned Guerilla's platoon that took the day. There was an unusual gusto to the fact that, in the previous batch, that is, the 2006 batch A, it was the same Guerilla's platoon that had won the football championship and so, special accolade was accorded to the man-Guerilla for a job well done.

For the female category, the volleyball match had ended some forty-five minutes ago in favour of Platoon 3. The score range between their rival team wasn't so much of a wide berth. Platoon 9 had come second in both games, female and male category, volleyball and football. The excitement in the camp was still on when the sky became overcast and began to sleet. It was only the drizzles that could disorganise the jubulations at the time, not even the soldiers. We ran into our dormitories to save our heads. For several hours, it rained cat and dog. That was the heaviest down pour so far since I'd been on the Orientation Camp and in Ekiti. I started to wonder if it was possible for the campfire to hold that night. We didn't

know what the officials had in mind. Whether prior to the commencement of the event, the water on the field would have been submerged. Or whether the officials would cancel the event since the fire woods would be difficult to be lit. If they did that, then the NYSC anthem, the third line which reads, "*under the sun or in the rain*", would be meaningless. After the rain had subsided, Franka and I like other soul mates went to cool off at the mammy market. The evening approached too quickly and seemingly cold. In spite of the heavy down pour that lasted about 2hrs and the marshy environment, the officials still required the preparations for the campfire to commence.

We'd been told by our platoon officers on various delicacies each platoon had to prepare and exhibit. I had not been able to stay long at the mammy because my attention was needed. It was my platoon assembly.

"All hands must be on deck", were the words of my platoon leader. "Some of you, especially the guys would chop firewood from the near by bushes, some of you would fill those drums with water and some of you would cook the meal....." said Amadi.

"Chop for fire woods?"

"How would that be possible, when the rains dampen all the woods in the bushes?" I thought. We were to choose our own spot in any part of the camp where we chose to do our cooking. This was supposed to be the grand competition where the award for the best meal would be given. It was in between the Reg. Hall and the refectory that my platoon chose to do their cooking. Every platoon had their own delicacy to make. Something that could confer them the award of winning the inter-platoon cooking competition. My platoon had chosen to make fried rice and the local 'Banga Soup' and 'Starch' a delicacy of the Deltans from the Niger Delta region. The

preparations took quality time. Every corner of the Orientation Camp had cooking practicals going on, like family menu soap on National Television Authority.

Those who'd gone to fetch firewoods had little or nothing. Before long, there was a truckload of firewood trooping into the camp ground and dumped in the middle of the field. Those were the woods that would be kindled as fuel to keep the cold away for that night. The camp was very busy that night. There was no hurry for anyone to go to bed. Not even the soldiers had the audacity to force us to the hostel not to talk of forcing us to bed. The camp was becoming lawless, no more lights out. We were meant to keep a round –the-clock vigil for the very first time in the Orientation camp. It was about 10.00pm that the event kicked off. Consider an environment with large tables and several assorted dishes lined up on them, and various officials and judges tasting to give their shrewd judgements. That was the situation of the campfire night. Dinner & supper or whatever it is called was to be a hot buffet and not the usual sit-down meals. I'd left the hostel and approaching the field hand in hand with Franka in order to get somewhere very comfortable that Mrs. Olusoji saw me and asked me to be the Master of Ceremony for the event.

"You'll conduct this", she said. Astonished by the sudden and impromptu request and imposition by the P.R.O., I collected the program list and skimmed through.

"The P.R.O wants me to anchor this event", I told Franka who'd thought the lawless night was an avenue for both of us to cling to each other until the mornings.

"Why would she do such a thing? Did she pre-inform you before now?" She asked me feeling disappointed.

"You can see she handed me the program list just right now".

"What does she require you to do and how would you organize yourself to face this crowd; seeing the calibre of people?" She was scared of my introversion.

"Tell her you can't. Tell her to delegate someone else. You're not the only one. Not this night", she said. "You promised to be with me all through the night you remember, don't you?"

"I know", I said. "But I can't tell her neither can I refuse to do it..."

"You'll do what?" She retorted me.

"You'll do no such thing", she queried.

"Don't you worry", I drew her close to me. We'd be together still. I'll get someone to assist me and I'll get to you wherever you are".

"You're not going to leave me anywhere, you hear me. I need you tonight. You know I'm cold. I need your hands wrapping around me. I can't even leave you for a moment".

"O.K! O.K, we'll get things straightened up", I muttered, holding her across the shoulders. "Go get your cagoule. I'll be waiting for you close to that stand". I pointed at the stand. It was where the D.J kept his equipments.

When she'd left for the hostel, I went to the P.R.O. to ask her what she wanted me to do that night.

"Ma, what is required that I do?"

"I'm sorry for imposing this on you. The officer I told to do this disappointed me. Anyway, you'll follow the list. Wherever you need assistance, call my attention. There's no time. I want you to start now. The state coordinator and Guests of honour are already seated. Take the microphone and commence." She handed me the

microphone and made to sit down. There was music at the background when we were talking.

When I was ready to set the dice rolling, I flapped my fingers at the D.J. to turn the music down.

"Hmm.... Hmm", I cleared my voice. "Good evening distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen. You are welcome to this grand occasion at Ise, Orun/Emure permanent Orientation Camp. I am your anchor for the night. My name is Morris Kieriyama; I introduced myself feeling confident and relaxed as I talked.

"We would recite the National Anthem and Pledge and the NYSC anthem before commencing this program to the fullest. I crave your indulgence to please be on your feet whilst we recite. After the count of three", I was feeling in charge as I commanded. Thereafter, the P.R.O. did the introduction of all the dignitaries that graced the occasion. There were two large tables where the dignitaries sat.

On the left, had the judges for the food competition. Major M.T. Usman was one of the recognized judges. Whereas, the table on the right had the State Coordinator, the P.R.O. and other invited guests of honour.

The first very important item on the program list was the presentation of various delicacies by the various platoons. Platoon 1 was to start the presentation. The rules of the presentation were that, the platoon whose turn it was to present would first take their dishes to the table of the State Coordinator and the guests of honour tastes' and give their commendations. But meanwhile, the Chief cook of the meals gives a brief run down on the preparation of the meals within a time limit of 2 mins. as well as the ingredients required to making such a delicacy. The name, origin and part of the country in which the particular desert is mostly consumed is not left out. After which the

same meal is taken to the table of the judges and the same routine is followed. Whilst, the first platoon moved away from the table of state coordinator to the judges, the second platoon followed suit in that order until it was the turn of the last platoon. When I'd called about three platoons, for their food presentation, it was now time to kindle the fire so that, those platoons that had succeeded in showcasing their meals could go to warm up around the fire.

The night was very chilly that a lot of the female Corps members had taken solace in their hostel. My girlfriend had been unable to return since she went back to get her cagoule. It was only the inferno that could keep us long in the cold else we froze to death.

"Kindle the fire!" I'd commanded the Man 'O' War who was in charge. They fuelled the woods and inflamed it, brightening the night with a fire that looked like the one from hell.

The dancing around the fire took off with the tune from local drumbeats and choruses. One platoon followed another in consecutive terms. The night had been designated for unending fun. So much food and drink. An opportunity for glutton to consume as much as they could. After a while, there was this group of vibrant fellows who wanted to gyrate. They were known as the Kegite Palmwine club. I'd given them time to perform when the leader of the group came to seek my permission.

He was a short dark complexioned guy. Looking even darker in the course of the night. He was small statured, looking like a pygmy. When I handed him the microphone, the words that blared out from the speakers were nothing less than ciphers. Very much incomprehensible.

"I am coming from my father's castikonko. Paul I know, Peter I know, who wa wa?"

"Was that supposed to be a question? Was he asking me that question?" I couldn't comprehend. So I retreated so he controlled the pace.

"Where is the drumito?" inquired the dude. Suddenly, a group of jobless dudes emanated from within the crowd with Kegs and bottles of palm wine. Some had gongs in their hands. Others had drum sets that they played to produce different sounds. It was very chaotic scenery. More and more Corps members joined the club, those that were members in their various institutions. They danced round the fire and shouted aloud when the flames blazed high into the skies.

The time had crept far into the night and the flames had succeeded in driving off the cold. It was about fifteen minutes of gyration by the Kegite club that I was handed back the microphone. It was a splendid performance though nonsensical and whatever they'd said needed clarification.

The food presentation was still on at the time the Kegite club was performing. It was the turn of platoon 16, the last platoon to go through the tables of the judges after which the results would be announced.

The event was to come to an end when the firewood has been completely consumed by the inferno. Several hours of qualitative night rest has been elapsed. It was the early hours of the morning. About 2 'O' clock at the time. The judges were compiling the result for the inter-platoon cooking competition. The interval, within which the results were announced, was a time out for the Corps members to groove-on. The D.J was at his best at the time.

When the compilations were done, the results were announced. It was the camp commandant, Major M.T. Usman that had announced it.

"The criteria for assessing this competition are: The format for presentation, the confidence of the presenter, the dress sense, the taste of the meal which is of paramount importance, the preparation procedures and lastly, the part of the country in which it is mostly consumed," announced the major.

At the end of the day, the platoon that had beaten the parameters was platoon 3. The camp commandant had stressed on the intrepidity of the chief cook who appeared fully dressed up like a restaurant chef, his general cognizance of the meal that was prepared and the delicious taste, was confirmed by all the judges including the State Coordinator.

The first and second runners up for the food competition were platoons 12 and 5. My platoon was no way enlisted. The meals prepared by my platoon were nothing to write home about. It was as good as called 'a dog's breakfast'. Especially, the fried rice, when I'd tasted it, it was like a soured meal. Very much inedible that I'd cursed. Marilyn was the chief cook of the meals. She'd augmented the cooking procedures and chosen the types of meals to be prepared that night. Whatever the 'starch' and 'banga soup' tasted like I'd not known.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The last night in the Orientation Camp was very brief. It was around 2.30am or 3.0' clock in the early hours of the morning that we'd gone to bed. A great number of the Corps members as a result of the anxiety of evacuating the camp had not been able to sleep all through the night until the mornings. Not even a catnap. What did they need sleep for when it was already dawn. If it were reasonable to forward the hands of the clock, some would have done it.

When we got back to the hostels, those who thought it was needless sleeping, started to gather their belongings together. I was feeling utterly exhausted to join the band wagon after the stress of the camp fire night so I collapsed on my bunk regardless of the noise in the room to sleep.

I was able to catch 3 hours of qualitative sleep before the pandemonium in the room and in the camp overwhelmed me. It was few minutes to 6.0' clock. The morning was still very dark as well as the room. There was total black out. Only the flames from candlesticks pinned on edges of various bunks brightened the room, and flashlights from flaming torches. When I got out of bed to view the room with my squinty eyes, it was the flames from the

candlesticks that shone on them. I scrubbed my eyes with the back of my fist to clear them. When I could see clearly, the room had become empty like the first day when we first got into it. No more mattresses. Only empty bunks. The few mattresses that were in sight had been folded to be returned.

I jumped down from my bunk and grabbed my pail of water that I'd fetched the night before and headed to have a clean fresh bath. That was the day we were to evacuate the camp ground, I couldn't believe it. But I believed strongly in the cliché that says, "Every beginning has an end", but why I didn't believe that that was the end of our stay in Ise, Orun/Emure permanent Orientation Camp, I couldn't comprehend.

The crowd of corps members I saw astonished me. A bunch of desperate and very eager folks desiring freedom from the snares of hungry battalion gathered around the camp store to dispose off their mattresses, I hadn't yet packed mine, so I hurried to do likewise. When I got to the camp store amidst the crowd, I discovered the officials were just arriving and the disposal of the mattresses were serially. I was number 630, which means I had a lot of time to while away. I started to regret my jumping out of bed even at the time I needed sleep the most.

The morning was still chilly and dark even at about 6.30am. After several time taken on the queue in front of the camp store, my number was called and so I disposed off my mattress and signed out to clear myself.

The event for P.O.P was to kick-off by 8.00am that morning. Preparations for the passing out parade had commenced. 8 am was 8a.m. No African Man or Nigerian timing. The State Governor as well as other important personalities were required to be arriving any moment. An event similar to the swearing in ceremony, which was an

avenue for our induction as Corps members. But the passing out ceremony was to expel us out of the camp to the wider environment and for the National Youth Service proper.

This ceremony formally brings the Orientation course to an end with a colourful parade of Corps members in platoon formations. At the end of the ceremony Corps members collect their letters of posting to their places of primary assignment and are expected to vacate their hostels in the camp. We'd been told on the event of the D-day. No wonder Corps members wouldn't let the daybreak confidently, before packing their baggage. I was yet to pack-up my belongings at the time, so I made to pack-up.

It was just some few minutes to the P.O.P. that vehicles started trooping into the camp. Those were the vehicles as we were made to understand, that would take us to our different post of primary assignment. There were the Nigerian Christian Corps Fellowship (NCCF) bus, BSES, FCMB, Governors Office Press, Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), etc. More and more vehicles kept trooping into the campground, encroaching the environment.

Vehicles of government functionaries and their entourage were beginning to come into the premises blaring their sirens. We were actually waiting for the arrival of the State Governor before commencing the event as everything was meant to be brief so that when we were given our posting letters, we could evacuate the camp and get to our deployment post before the day came to an end. The ceremony was to be a very colourful one. The several inter-platoon parade and march past were to be displayed in just a few minutes. We'd already been summoned to the parade ground. Those who were selected for the march

past had been long on the parade ground before the rest of us were assembled. Several things were unfolded that day. The most imperative at the ceremony was the state Coordinator's Valedictory Speech.

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"We believe that because of its uniqueness, the NYSC is pre-eminently suited to reverse the dearth of professionals in the rural areas. Therefore, one of the primary aims of the scheme's rural development thrust through the Integrated Rural Development Programme is to assist the Government in the long term, to bring rural areas to the same level of development as obtained in the Urban areas. At the end of this Orientation panorama today, Corps members will be posted to the various establishments, public and private sectors scattered all over the state for their primary assignments. You are expected to put in your best to make life better for your communities," said the State Coordinator. She was stressing on the importance of our primary assignment. She was the most important figure and the representative of the Governor, the Chairman of the State Governing Board, Mr. Oluwole Ariyo who had given the Governor's speech earlier on.

The State Coordinator, Mrs. O.A Erokwu was still delivering her speech.

"Meanwhile, I would wish to draw your attention to a common phenomenon among Corps members which is becoming habitual for they not only want to influence their posting, but to dictate their choice of places of posting for the primary assignments. While I assure you that posting will be done with particular reference to your fields of study, I would wish to warn that we will not honour letter

of request indicating names of Corps members for the purpose of primary assignment. In addition, it has been discovered that Corps members are fond of deliberately rejecting official posting only to report and start work in their places of choice and later try to lobby the secretariat for endorsement. It should interest you to know that those found indulging in this act of indiscipline have been appropriately punished in line with the provision of NYSC bye-laws. We shall not hesitate to deal with any Corps member who engages in this nefarious activity. You are therefore enjoined to accept your posting in the true Spirit of national service. Ensure that you settle down at your place of primary assignment on time latest two weeks after leaving camp". She acquainted us. The service scheme was far much more than the Orientation program, which is only a facet and a smaller part at that. Almost everyone of us as the orientation program was concluding, had been contemplating on our post of primary assignment. The state capital was the destination of utmost desire. Until we were handed our posting letters, our hearts ruminated about. I was certain I was going to be in the state capital but my area of primary assignment was where I did not know. Mrs. Erokwu was still at her best acquainting us with life after camp.

"Request to travel outside the state during the service can only be granted after due consideration through the Inspector", she said. "However in the case of overseas journeys, the Director-General through the state Coordinator endorses such trips when it is absolutely necessary. The Ekiti State NYSC Secretariat has Zonal offices in all Local Government Areas in the state as indicated in the service guide. Corps members are advised to identify these sub-offices and as much as possible channel all request, problems, complaints, proposals and

other matters through their respective zonal inspectors to me, your State Coordinator. No Corps member will be attended to in the secretariat except you pass through your Zonal Inspector. Where the matter is considered very urgent, the Corps member could send an advance copy to the secretariat. And very importantly, during the course of the service year, you may be called upon to represent the NYSC secretariat in any National, State and Local Government engagements. It is a disservice to the scheme to fail to give your best on such occasions as the need arises. It is the height of indiscipline to refuse to obey such calls. Be patriotic by giving. I have no doubt in my mind that you will work towards bringing more honours to the State Secretariat in particular and the NYSC scheme in general. For those of you coming to Ekiti State for the first time, I must let you know that most societies are mixed grill of grace and deception. You should therefore endeavour at all times to be careful and to be alert.

You are expected to be security-conscious at all times and assist agencies responsible in maintaining law and order to ensure that peace prevails.

Finally, in order to ensure a positive public image for the scheme, every Corps member should strive to be a good ambassador in all aspects of his/her life throughout the service year. Once again, I heartily welcome you to the scheme and wish you a hitch-free and highly rewarding Orientation Course/service year in Ekiti State. Thank you!". The state coordinator ended her speech and climbed down the podium.

We appreciated her with a thunderous clap offering for being a mother indeed and taken us as her children. She'd given us her motherly piece of advice. The next personality that mounted the lectern was the camp director Mr. C.A. Ojo.

"I want to stress upon what the State Coordinator has just talked about. It is going to be on your posting. Any moment from now, you'll be issued your posting letters. So, before you become a defaulter, I would like to expatiate on the clarity of your posting and re-posting.

The State Secretariat as much as possible handles the posting and re-posting exercise regulations. Hence, the secretariat dissipates too much energy and time to ensure that Corps members get posted for primary assignment to areas of felt needs, but most importantly to areas relevant to their field of specialization.

Over the years, Corps members have been observed to engage in all sorts of nefarious activities and disingenuous pranks just to secure posting for primary assignment to places of their choice. Some of these pranks include:

- Bribery of NYSC officials.
- Forgery of posting letters
- Soliciting for favourable posting through high ranking Armed personnel.
- Soliciting for a favourable posting from eminent people in the civil society.
- Bringing parents and guardians who whip up sentiments by shedding crocodile tears.
- Colluding with employers of labour to receive fake rejection letters.
- Forceful acquisition of rejection letters by threatening employers of labour.
- False disclosure about health condition
- Stealing of company letter headed paper
- Forgery and presentation of fake medical reports
- False declaration of promise of permanent employment
- Submission of letters of request belonging to the business outfits of friends and relations such that

the one year period of National Service will be turned into a jamboree session etc.

You are therefore **WARNED** not to try any of those listed unlawful acts to avoid their ugly consequences. The secretariat has set a high-powered machinery in motion to track down the unpatriotic elements who might wish to perpetrate these dubious pranks. **BE WARNED!!!**

The Camp Director warned before going back to his seat.

"Since the establishment of the National Youth Service Corps Scheme, in 1973, there had been the need to reward honest hardworking and painstaking Corps members. This has served as a motivating factor to participants.

Corps members whose performances are considered outstanding during the service year receive honours award while others with just good performance are given certificate of commendation.

However, the following are criteria for National, State and Local Government Honours Award: - Corps Members general performance during the orientation and primary assignment. This means the real performances, behaviour/attitude of Corps members to work as reflected in his/her supervisor's confidential report.

- Special report on outstanding performance, contribution and participation in the various programmes of the scheme right from the Orientation Camp till the last day of the service year.
- Distinguished performance at community development service activities and primary assignment.
- Any other personal activities of the Corps Members that enhanced the image of the scheme. All corps

members are expected to do their best and strive for an award at the service year. Performance evaluation reports are written on Corps Member at various stages of the service year; Orientation, primary assignment and Community development service.

You are expected to complete the Performance Evaluation form at the Camp for reporting by the NYSC official, Platoon Leader and Military instructors. Some exercises are to be done quarterly during primary assessment and should be countersigned by the Corps Employer or Supervisor for the Community Development Service. The Supervisor of the CD project you executed should also endorse the form". Those were the words of the Chairman of NYSC, Ekiti State Governing Board. The ceremony came to a halt after about four hours with a display of very colourful parade in platoon basis.

We were to go for the collection of our posting letters. The Camp was so rowdy at the time so much so that, it seemed like a market arena were transactions takes place. We were to be given the posting letters at the Reg. Hall, so we trooped to queue outside the hall since the hall couldn't contain the about one thousand seven hundred of us. "Line up accordingly", one of the officials told us. There were ranges of about a hundred on a queue. When I spotted where my range fell, I ran to join the queue.

Some who'd been early enough to be at the forefront and quick to collect their posting letters had started to lament especially when their post of primary assignment and the local government was unfavourable or wasn't where they expected or wished to be. Whereas, others who had their desires coming to realization or their dreams coming true were overjoyed. Either, they'd not

expected so much but had been given so much or that they could just make do with their stations.

Like I said, I was very much convinced my station would be at the state capital but uncertain about my post of primary assignment. My surety on my station was on the ground that virtually all members of the 'OBS' would be working with the P.R.O. at the state secretariat at the state capital. She'd told us in several occasions. That was one utmost benefit of being an 'OBS' crew. Eventhough, I did not know were my post of primary assignment would be, I was expectant. Probably, the Banking Sector as par my discipline as an economist. But my chances of being in any bank were as good as impossible as I'd not partaken in any interview or written any test. I was hopeful anyways. Since the State Coordinator had told us our posting were dependent on our field of study, then, I was as good as being posted to the Banking Sector of any financial institution.

When I received my posting letter and perused through, I was disappointed. I was actually posted to the state capital (Ado-Ekiti) as my certainty knew no bounds. But my post of deployment had no connection with my field of study. Where is the connectivity between Economics as a social science and Broadcasting? I had been deployed to serve in the Broadcasting Service of Ekiti State (BSES). Some said it was my extraordinary skills in presentation at the radio station and my casting ability that required my deployment post.

"You would do well as a broadcaster" said others including the P.R.O.

"As for your field of study, you could be placed at the commercial department. No big deal with that", the P.R.O. told me when I showed her the letter. "Don't worry, we would see at the capital. Farewell". She bade

me off. When I left the P.R.O. and some of my colleagues who desired to know where I was posted, I went into the hostel to carry my luggage and to wait for my girlfriend who was still struggling to receive her posting letter. At the time she succeeded, when she was approaching me, she was grinning from ear to ear with an overwhelming joy written all over her.

"Guess where I was posted to". She jumped all over me in excitement.

"I can't", I said. How could I guess where a philosopher would be posted to, that is, if the parameter for posting was really one's field of study. She'd studied Philosophy at the University. If I were to guess and guess correctly, then, it would be a school, either to teach Philosophy. But she'd been wishing never to be sent to a school and with her mood, it was off the track. So I thought about another possible place that would require a philosopher. When I couldn't come to terms with my thinking faculty, I inquired from her.

"Where were you posted to? Tell me. I can't guess".

"Guess! Oh.... just try", she said.

"I can't!" I yelled and dragged the letter off her hand.

"Office of the Governor". I couldn't believe my eyes. "how come?" I asked.

"I don't know. I am a star, you know. I am a lucky girl. I've got to call my folks and tell them". She was jubilating. "It is not only OBS that gives you good posting; she ridiculed. "I'm at the state capital and the Governor's office at that can you beat it?" She swung here and there like a pendulum showing whoever cared to know.

"Hey! It's okay!" I cautioned as I was becoming envious. If you like, announce it on NTA or the Cable

Network News (CNN). Get set and lets leave this place. We're going the same direction. We would be taken the same vehicle. Get your things so we don't miss this ample opportunity. You know we are Novice".

The journey from the camp to the state capital took about an hour thirty minutes. We'd left the camp at about 3pm and had gotten to our destination some minutes to 5pm. We'd stopped by at the Governor's office to drop off Franka who was still very much joyed even at the beauty of the complex. When I got to my own post, I was utterly disappointed. Though it was the State Capital, it was almost outskirts, a boundary between Ado local government and Ifaki, another local government area.

But anyways, afterall, if you want to find me, you could find me at the General Administration Department under the auspices of the Governor's Office. "Surprised" it was part of my star, just like my girlfriend said.

THE END.



■ *About the Book* ■

This book showcases the wonderland of the 'Fountain of Knowledge' with its numerous natural endowments and serenity as a home to both the Ekitis and non-Ekitis alike and primarily gives an insight to incoming prospective Corps Members deployed to Ekiti State and other states in the federation who haven't yet had the opportunity of partaking in the fully packed N.Y.S.C. Programme especially the once in a lifetime camping experience.

■ *About the Author* ■



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CAMP Life



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